

WANT OF PROPER SPIRIT AND ENERGY:
THE PENOBSCOT EXPEDITION OF 1779

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Military History

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

WANT OF PROPER SPIRIT AND ENERGY: THE PENOBSCOT EXPEDITION OF 1779, by Major Dale W. Burbank, 117 pages.

This thesis explores the ability of Massachusetts to conceive, launch, and execute offensive expeditions in relation to the failure of the 1779 Penobscot Expedition. This thesis seeks to highlight the difference between the colony's success in building and sustaining expeditions with its inability to overcome the limitations of its provincial army system. A secondary question focuses on how the army's source of soldiers, the militia, affected the outcome of the colony's expedition. This study reviews Massachusetts' colonial military operations in order to track its evolutionary growth in provincial armies beginning with King Philips' War through the Seven Year's War. Based on an analysis of the historical capabilities of Massachusetts' provincial armies, this thesis reviews the constraints of the provincial army system on the Penobscot Expedition and its leadership.

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First and foremost, this thesis is dedicated to my Grandmother, Alice French, for it was her love of local history that introduced me to the Penobscot Expedition. As a young child, I accompanied her as she delivered freshly baked goods to local Castine stores. It was during these short car rides she told me the story of Fort George and the battle fought there many years before.

In writing this thesis I embarked on a path I could not have envisioned at its start. Both enlightening and humbling, it continues to inspire me to continue to expand my knowledge and understanding of a critical era in American military history. For helping me in doing so, I want to extend my greatest appreciation to my thesis committee. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Joseph Fischer who not only managed to keep my thesis relevant, but also exhibited great patience. I thank Dr. Sean Kalic not only for his inspiring classroom instruction, but providing my insightful feedback. Finally I owe thanks to Mr. Dave Weaver for his thoughtful consideration and for always making the time to talk about my research progress. To this team, I am grateful to the contribution you all made towards expanding my knowledge of and study of history.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It may be not improper to mention that the Action at our landing on Bagaduce might have been called brilliant, had the event of the Enterprise been fortunate. But let military Men not talk of glory who lack success.

— General Peleg Wadsworth, 1828

The Penobscot Expedition

The Penobscot Expedition remained the worst naval disaster in terms of ships lost in American history until the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Despite the defeat's magnitude, the expedition contributed little to the course of the Revolutionary War, although it significantly damaged Massachusetts' fiscal situation. For the colony, it represents a closing chapter in a century of colonial warfare waged for both its defense and in support of the expansion of the British Empire. Findings from a board of inquiry conducted after the incident assigned primary responsibility on the leadership of the naval commander, while assigning partial blame on the inability to raise the appropriate number of troops. Most historians since have agreed with the board's assessment with some minor variations. While leadership played a significant role in the failure, the constraints of the leaders and the soldiers they employed are largely ignored.

The expedition represents the ability of Massachusetts to conceive, launch, and execute offensive expeditions during the latter stages of the Revolutionary War. Yet the expedition remains consistent with a century-long pattern of colonial expeditions. This thesis seeks to highlight the difference between the colony's success in building and sustaining expeditions with its inability to overcome the limitations of its provincial army

system. A secondary question focuses on how the army's source of soldiers, the militia, affected the outcome of the colony's expedition.

Administratively, Massachusetts learned many lessons from a series of colonial wars and refined its ability to assemble necessary components of an expedition. The colony proved capable of purchasing supplies and provisions, procuring arms and ammunition, and in the case of the Penobscot Expedition, assembling a large fleet of warships. Yet there were inherent limitations to the limited objective provincial armies that the colony depended upon to conduct offensive expeditions. Furthermore, the part-time militia, defensive in design, from where the colony drew from to provide its leaders and soldiers introduced its own set of challenges and limitations.

Subsequent chapters review the impact of the militia and the provincial army system on the outcomes of Massachusetts' offensive expeditions. As a fundamental building block of a provincial army, it is first necessary to review the unique characteristics of the Massachusetts militia and determine what limitations carried forward into the armies. Secondly, it is pertinent to briefly review the historical challenges Massachusetts faced over the century of warfare in fielding provincial armies. The two factors are interrelated; the capabilities of the soldiers and leaders drawn from the militia affected the outcome of offensive expeditions. Similarly, the increasing demand of provincial armies influenced the character of the Massachusetts militia.

Published Works

Despite the magnitude of the disaster for Massachusetts, historians studying the Penobscot Expedition will find that its insignificance in the overall context of the war has discouraged significant analysis of the battle. A compelling human drama, much of the

historical narratives treat it as such. Many of the earlier secondary works that surfaced in conjunction with America's centennial are transcriptions of primary source documents stitched together by the author's narrative. Others works are chapters in larger volumes of a regional historical surveys. Chief amongst these are Maine historians George Wheeler who wrote *History of Castine, Penobscot and Brooksville* and Nathan Goold who wrote several volumes on the battle and the Cumberland County Regiment. Massachusetts historian Gilbert Nash also published many documents related to the expedition's leader, General Solomon Lovell.

Modern works on the Penobscot Expedition emerge during America's bicentennial period. Charles Flood's *Rise and Fight Again* provides a well-researched and comprehensive narrative of the event, although he demonstrates a strong bias against the actions of the naval commander, Captain Dudley Saltonstall. Regardless, Flood's narrative should be the first stop for the casual reader looking to study the expedition. As a counter to Flood's findings, George Buker's *The Penobscot Expedition: Commodore Saltonstall and the Massachusetts Conspiracy of 1779* uses scientific analysis of the harbor and the limitations of Saltonstall's ships to explain his reluctance to attack the Royal Navy ships in the Bagaduce Harbor despite an overwhelming superiority in number of ships and guns. James Leamon's *Revolution Downeast* is a study of the impact of the American Revolution on Maine's progress towards independent statehood. His work provides insight on the American-British frictions that generated specifically along the Maine coast during the revolution.

The proceedings of the Massachusetts General Court's Committee of Enquiry, published less than two months after the incident, preserved the testimonies, journals, and

logs of many of the event's participants. For the British, Dr. John Calef preserved the British perspective in his journal published in 1781. Additional documents pertaining to the Penobscot Expedition including recollections are in the Maine Historical Society's *Documentary History of the State of Maine* series edited by James Baxter, particularly volumes 16 and 17. Other reprinted documents are in *The Acts And Resolves, Public And Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay*. Many documents are found reprinted in many of the secondary sources as well.

In analyzing the New England militia that participated in the expedition, there are additional key sources that provide context to the militia system. Kyle Zelner's *A Rabble in Arms, Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Phillip's War* provides considerable insight into the recruiting practices of the Massachusetts militia during King Phillip's War. Fred Anderson, a historian of the Seven Years' War in America has published two extensive works that highlight the militia systems in New England. The first *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War*, is particularly focused on the Massachusetts militia. His second and more exhaustive work, *Crucible of War*, provides a much larger context to the Seven Years War. Another historian, John Shy, also has extensively written on the New England militia in his book, *A People Numerous and Armed*, and provides a framework for the social structure and importance of the militia as an agent of the revolutionary government.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPING THE MASSACHUSETTS MILITIA TRADITION

The Indians are just now engaging us with at least one hundred men, and have slain four of our men already – Richard Tozier, James Barry, Isaac Botts, and Tozier’s son – and burnt Benoni Hodson’s house. Sirs, if ever you have any love for us and the country, now show yourselves with men to help us, or else we are all in great danger to be slain, unless our God wonderfully appears for our deliverance. They that cannot fight, let them pray.

— Roger Plaisted, 1675

Introduction

In order to understand the ability of Massachusetts to conduct offensive operations, it is necessary to understand the militia system which produced the soldiers and leaders of the provincial armies. Defensive in nature and local in its organization, the militia’s narrow focus proved a constraint to the creation and implementation of provincial armies. Yet it served as the primary source of military manpower to the colony. Shaped by Puritan ideals, the militia compromised effectiveness to ensure local control and the prevent governmental oppression observed in England. In order to understand the ability of Massachusetts to conduct offensive operations, it is necessary to understand the militia system which produced the soldiers and leaders of the provincial armies. Defensive in nature and local in its organization, the militia’s narrow focus proved a constraint to the creation and employment of provincial armies. Yet it served as the primary source of military manpower to the colony. Shaped by Puritan ideals, the militia compromised effectiveness in order maintain local control and avoid the pitfalls of the English militia system.

A modification of the English militia system, fear of standing armies, and financial need constrained the Massachusetts system. The English militia was a two-tiered system consisting of the defensive trainbands and an untrained general militia, used for offensive operations. With pressing defensive needs and a disdain for an offensive forces, the bay colony organized all men from sixteen to sixty exclusively into local trainbands.¹ Within the town-centric militia companies, popularly elected officers reflected the local social hierarchy. With limited means at the colony level, responsibility for equipping the militia fell on the individual and the town. Training for the militia remained limited and individually provided weaponry lacked standardization.

The establishment of provincial armies beginning with King Philip's War stressed the militia system. The militia became a recruiting pool for provincial forces in addition to its local defense role. The colony established locally based quotas and empowered the towns to impress soldiers when necessary. Impressment brought challenges to the town who struggled to balance local needs with the needs of the colony. After experimenting

¹Kyle F. Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip's War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 21-28. The English militia system established two levels of militia, the trainbands designed for home defense and the general militia. Trainbands in theory consisted of the middle class, the farmers, yeomen, and other well off members of the community. The trainbands were better trained and maintained they own arms for service. Offensive operations outside of England drew from general militia and consequently from the lower ranks of society. Campaigns involving the general militia often resulted in the pillaging and razing of the countryside to and from the campaigns leading to general distrust for standing armies. The administration of the militia system initially remained at the local levels. Realizing the inefficiency of a locally administered militia, Charles I accelerated the centralization of the militia system using Lord Lieutenants to maintain and train the trainbands as well as call up men for foreign service. The loss of local control and the creation of a two-tiered militia system was a major concern for the Puritans that started the Massachusetts Bay Colony who made all freemen part of trainbands, discarding the concept of the general militia.

with impressment during King Philips War, the colony focused on enticing volunteers through increasingly lucrative bounties and land grants. Volunteer soldiers, while fitting within the democratic ideals of the colony, could be problematic. Familiarity between the soldiers and their popularly elected officers often led to slack discipline, especially when troops entered into large provincial armies.

Finally, a locally based militia system was not conducive to developing the leaders needed to lead expeditions and conduct larger-scale European-like operations. Wartime militia tasks consisted of town watch, garrisoning fortified blockhouses, or limited patrolling. Frontier warfare often consisted of small-scale skirmishes and lop-sided ambushes rather than large standing battles. For successful frontier militia leaders, large scale conventional operations were unfamiliar. Although regimental organizations existed, they were largely administrative. All of these issues made the transition from militia service to provincial duty problematic.

Building A New Militia System

Shortly after the Massachusetts Bay Colony established its charter, its General Court established a militia system. Initial militia obligations, published 22 March 1631, charged the towns to enforce ownership of arms for all men and their servants and when necessary, provide arms on credit to those who could not afford them.

That [every] towne within this pattent shall, before the 5th of Aprill nexte, take espetiall care that [every person] within their towne, (except magistrates & ministers,) as well servts as others, furnished with good & sufficient armes allowable by the capt or other officers, those that want & are of abilitie to buy them themselves, others that are unable to have them pvided by the towne, for the

present, & after to receive satisfaccon for that they disburse when they shalbe able.²

A few weeks later, the court expanded on the initial law by establishing a basic load of ammunition at one pound of powder, twenty rounds of shot, and two fathom of match enforceable by fines and mandated weekly drill.³ The colony soon realized that weekly drill was too demanding and by that November reduced them to a monthly basis.⁴ It further caveated the requirement in 1634 to exclude the agricultural months of July and August.⁵ As a compromise to militia commanders, the General Court granted the authority to train unskilled men up to three days a week.

The town was the focal point of the militia system. Each town of sufficient size formed a company of militia. Initially company size was non-standard, but sixty-four men companies became the norm by 1672. If unable to field a company, towns nominated lesser officers to lead the militia detachment or combined with other towns to create a full company.⁶ Captains commanded companies assisted by a lieutenant, an ensign, three sergeants, and three corporals. Initially, two-thirds of the men bore muskets

²Nathaniel Bradstreet Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, vol 1, 1628-1641 (Boston: William White Press, 1853), 1:84. Spelling errors are from the original document.

³Ibid., 85.

⁴Ibid., 102.

⁵Ibid., 124.

⁶William Henry Whitmore, ed., *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts*, reprinted from the edition of 1672, with the supplements through 1686 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1890), 176-177.

with the remaining carried pikes.⁷ Designed to protect the flanks of the musketeers, by King's Philip's War the pike proved ineffective against Indian tactics and the General Court ordered all militia armed with muskets.⁸ Usually inactive between drill periods, militiamen rotated through watch duty or worked to improve the town's defenses.



Figure 1. First Muster-Salem, Massachusetts, 1637

Source: Don Troianim, *The First Muster*, National Guard Bureau Heritage Series (Washington, DC: National Guard Bureau, 1985).

Note: The pike in the left foreground. Initially a third of the militia carried pikes up until 1675, the first year of King Phillip's War.

In December 1636 in a series of militia laws, the colony aligned the companies into three geographically aligned regiments. The governor retained authority as the chief

⁷Jack S. Radabaugh, "The Militia of Colonial Massachusetts," *Military Affairs*, 18, no 1 (Spring 1954): 2.

⁸Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor*, 5:47.

general of the militia.⁹ The first step towards a unified and standardized militia structure, the establishment of regiments set the groundwork for better coordination between militia companies. The laws also established a system of popular election for officers. While in reality units only nominated their officers for the General Court's approval, but rarely did the court overturn election results. In many cases men assumed their election results were final. Elected officers then appointed their non-commissioned officers. In a few cases, closely contested elections led to near mutiny. When coupled with pressure from a 1664 English investigation which found militia elections a violation their charter, the General Court reinstituted its authority to appoint officers in 1668.¹⁰ Local influence remained, as the town's militia committee nominated the officers. Additional laws in 1643 expanded the regimental structure, appointing sergeant majors to act as operational leaders.¹¹ The General Court charged the Sergeant Major with assembling the regiment annually so ~~that~~ every man may know his place."¹² By 1672 the size of regiments, now aligned along county lines, made mustering the entire unit difficult, so the requirement dropped to once every three years.¹³ The regiment's officers met once or twice a year to discuss

⁹Ibid., 186-187.

¹⁰T.H. Breen, "English Origins and the New World Development: The Case of the Covenanted Militia in Seventeenth Century Massachusetts," *Past and Present*, no 57 (November 1972): 93.

¹¹This term was gradually shortened to just major and was used interchangeably in official court records.

¹²Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor*, 5:43.

¹³Ibid.

regimental business and coordinate defensive efforts. Largely administrative in nature, the regiment played little role in the tactical employment of the militia.

Militia laws introduced in 1672 expanded further defined militia requirements and established local militia committees. It imposed stiffer penalties for failure for those who missed drill or failed to maintain their arms. It also checked the growing military authority of the Sergeant Major. The court ordered that, ~~no~~ Major of any Regiment shall march with his Regiment out of the County, wherein he hath Comand, nor cause any part thereof so to do without Order from the General Court, Councell [sic] of the Commonwealth or Major General, except it be in pursuit of the Enemy upon a rout.”¹⁴ More significant is the establishment of a ~~Committee of Militia~~” within every town. Composed of local magistrates or deputies and the top three militia officers, the colony empowered it to ~~order~~ and dispose of the Militia of their Town for their own safety and defense.”¹⁵ The committees, yet another layer of civilian control, were key in executing impressment procedures and enforcing penalties on the noncompliant.

The Massachusetts’ militia first significant challenge came during King Philip’s War in 1675. Although the militia previously conducted limited offensive operations, at its core it was a defensive organization. The town remained its focal point charged primarily with local defense and the assistance to their neighbors when required. The wars of the next century created an increasing need for centrally planned offensive operations, a purpose for which the militia were not prepared.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

Impressment and King Philip's War (1675-1676)

During King Philip's War, the colony struggled with impressment and its impacts. Volunteers, although employed in limited numbers during the conflict circumvented the issues with impressment, yet proved more expensive and difficult to manage. Experimentation with impressment led the colony away from it and more towards a more expensive volunteer system. It became a model of service that remained intact through the American Revolution. Early efforts in impressment began during the 1637 Pequot War in which the colony called two hundred soldiers into active service. While the majority of soldiers volunteered, the General Court granted authority to the towns to ~~im~~impre[sic] such as are not freemen, at their discretion."¹⁶ Limited calls to active service occurred only five times between 1638 and 1655, using the Pequot War impressment system.¹⁷ The demands of King Philip's War forced an expansion of the colony's draft system. To raise needed troops to prosecute the war, the General Court issued each town quotas filled by volunteers or impressed soldiers. Locally, the town militia committees decided how to fill their quotas by delicately balancing local needs with those of the colony.

By 1675, tensions had been increasing between the Indians and English settlers for decades. Disputes over land rights, economic dependency, and the imposition of English legal and religious jurisdiction over the Indian tribes fueled growing resentment. However, rivalries between tribes thus far prevented a unified effort against the English

¹⁶Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor*, 1:192.

¹⁷Zelner, 50. General qualifications for a freeman during this period were men over the age of twenty-one who owned some land and were members of the church.

colonies. The spark needed to unite the tribes arrived in Plymouth that June with the murder of an Indian informant and the subsequent trial of three Wampanoag braves. The trial, which featured Indian witnesses and jurors, tried the three men. Finding them guilty, it sentenced them to death. Angered by questionable English jurisdiction in the matter, local tribes attacked the nearby town of Swansea in retaliation.¹⁸ The Plymouth Governor, Edward Winslow, immediately ordered neighboring militia companies to relieve the besieged town. The Massachusetts Bay Colony quickly pledged their support, sending two hundred men, arriving on 28 June 1675, nine days after the initial attack. Arriving at Swansea, the militia found the Indians had left several days prior.¹⁹ In the creation of this relief force, Massachusetts unwittingly took the first step towards redefining its way of war.

While previous operations usually required volunteers to fill the ranks, the relief force reflected three distinct methods of raising provincial companies. From the militia, ~~the~~ Govr & Council have ordered 100 able souldjers [sic] forthwith *impressed* [emphasis added] out the severall [sic] Towns according to the proportions hereunder written for the aid and assistance of our confederate Plymouth in the designe afoote agst [sic] the Indians.”²⁰ Under the command of Captain Daniel Henchman, the force took volunteers when available, but due to time constraints often resorted to impressment. Recruits for a

¹⁸George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill Press, 1896), 46.

¹⁹Guy Chet, *Conquering The American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 42.

²⁰Bodge, 47. As quoted from the Massachusetts Archives, vol 67.

second troop of horse came from volunteers requested from the five cavalry troops around Boston.²¹ Exclusively volunteers filled the ranks of a third company led by former privateer Samuel Mosley. A successful privateer in Jamaica, he gained local notoriety the previous spring by bringing in two Dutch pirate ships into Boston. Leveraging his popularity, he even convinced ten or twelve of his former privateers to sign on.²²

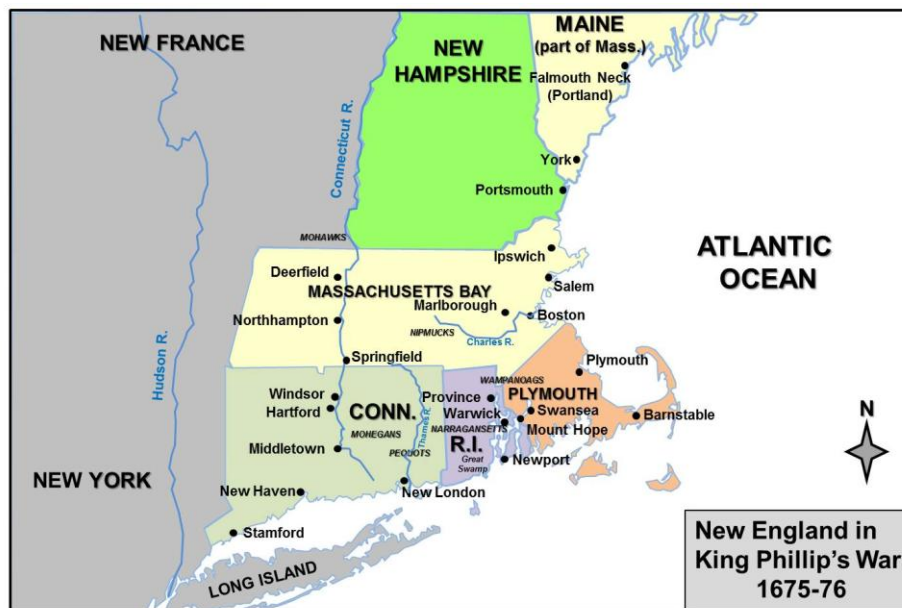


Figure 2. New England in King Phillip's War 1675-1676
Source: Created by author.

As the war continued, the colony required more troops to garrison fortifications and to mount expeditions. Relying on the militia committees to manage manpower requirements, the colony issued larger quotas. The militia committees, a blend of the

²¹Ibid., 79.

²²Samuel Gardiner Drake ed., *The Present State Of New-England With Respect To the Indian War* (Boston: Samuel N. Dickison Printer, 1833), 9-10.

town's top civil and military leaders, carefully balanced the town's needs for self-defense with the quotas of the colony. Once decided upon, the town constable served warrants to the selected men. Many of communities expendable members found themselves selected for colonial service. In general, committees chose single men over married men, transients in lieu of stable, respected citizens and men with criminal records over law-abiding citizens.²³ While many served their duty when called to serve, others resisted the draft. In rare cases, some men legally hired substitutes to serve their obligation. Yet others received protection through family social influence exerted on the militia committees. Men without connections simply avoided the draft by constantly shifting from town to town. As the war continued, impressments created resentment amongst the population that the system drew upon. In May 1676, the General Court showed its dismay with draft dodgers and established stiffer penalties to curb men avoiding service.

This Court, taking into consideration the great disappointment the country hath suffered by reason of non appearance of souldjers impressed for serve severall expeditions, doe judge meete that every person impressed as a souldier for the service of the country, and neglecting to make his appearance according to order, every such foote souldier shall pay the sume of fower pounds, and every trooper shall pay the sume of sixe pounds, and if their neglects or refusall be accompanied with refractorines, reflection or contempt upon authority, such persons shall be punished with death or some other greivous punishment.²⁴

Widespread resistance made it more difficult to enforce punishment. To do so meant that the militia committees had to confront the victims directly.

Despite its issues, Massachusetts impressed enough soldiers to conduct its campaigns. At the height of the Narragansett Campaign, Massachusetts Bay put 572

²³Zelner, 53-43.

²⁴Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor*, 5:78-79.

soldiers into the field, organized into six companies of foot (including one volunteer company) and one cavalry squadron. However there was a clear preference by the colony for all-volunteer units. In May of 1676, Captain Mosley received generous terms from the General Court in exchange for raising his own company. Immune to tedious garrison duty, his conduct of war was left to his ~~best~~ discretions for destroying the enemy,” while affording his men ~~the~~ benefit that may accrew [sic] by captives or plunder” in addition to standard soldier benefits.²⁵

Logistically, the colony depended on towns to equip the men they sent to the provincial forces and to support provincial forces operating within their area. The limitations of the colony’s supply system were apparent during the largest operation of the war, the ~~Great~~ Swamp Fight.” Despite advanced planning the colony only managed to amass a two-day supply for its troops.²⁶ With this in mind, the New England troops could not adopt a less costly strategy when attacking the main Narragansett fort. With their tactical options limited by logistical support, the leaders opted for an aggressive attack resulting in unnecessary casualties.

With the death of King Philip, the Indian alliance disintegrated. While the war’s toll on the English was significant, the war brought the Indians to the brink of starvation. Severely weakened by the war, the ability of the Indian tribes to organize against the English disappeared. Yet many tribes continued to resist the English as allies of the French over the next seventy-five years. For Massachusetts, its experimentation with

²⁵Ibid., 5:94-95.

²⁶Chet, 52.

impressment was distasteful. While it remained a permanent fixture within the colony's future wars, the colony looking increasingly towards volunteerism.

King William's War and Expeditionary Experimentation

Whereas King Philip's War tested the militia's ability to generate forces for provincial armies, King William's War tested Massachusetts' ability to prosecute offensive expeditions. Similarly, where challenges in manpower dominated the last war, logistical challenges constrained the next. Conducted from 1689 to 1697, King William's War was a product of English and French expansionism that required more European-style military operations. Yet on the frontiers, warfare changed little from the Indian wars. Brutal raids and subsequent retaliation conducted by both the English and the French aided by Indian allies characterized frontier warfare with little discrimination between combatants and unarmed women and children. Communities along the frontier remained challenged by the need to provide for both its own defense and for the colony's operations.

Massachusetts' entry into the war began the revocation of its charter in 1684 and its inclusion into the New England Dominion in 1686. The colonies, particularly Massachusetts proved to be difficult to control and often resisted English policies. After a series of incidents, Charles II revoked the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In an effort to streamline colonial matters, Charles II established the Dominion of New England that eventually encompassed all of New England, New York, and New Jersey. Tensions also began to grow between the English colonies and New France as the two empires competed for land, resources and Indian trading rights. The royally appointed governor, Sir Edmund Andros, sought to strengthen English claims along the contested

border between Massachusetts and Canada. He planned a series of outposts along the coast of Maine. After building a series of forts garrisoned by British troops brought from New York, he reached his most eastern point of his campaign at the Bagaduce Peninsula on the Penobscot Bay.

The Peninsula was the home of Frenchman Baron Jean-Vincent de St. Castin who established a trading post with the Indians. St. Castin had cultivated his relationship with the local Indian tribes and had even married the daughter of one of the local chiefs. Andros sought to convert St. Castin to the English side, but failing that destroyed his home. The Indians considered the act an insult and launched a series of retaliation raids that would blossom into full-scale war.²⁷ Meanwhile in England, the Glorious Revolution resulted in the assumption of William and Mary to the throne and spelled the end of the New England Dominion. Returning to Boston, Puritan leaders quickly arrested Andros and reasserted Massachusetts' independence. Although stripped from power, the frontier war Andros helped create continued unabated. The French and their Indian allies took all of the new forts one by one. Royal troops abandoned their posts along the Maine coast and those that remained were often removed by Massachusetts for their real or suspected ties to the Anglican Church. The following May a French and Indian war party from Quebec captured the last fort at Casco, Maine. This collapsed Massachusetts's eastern frontier and led to a significant depopulation of Maine.²⁸

²⁷Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars of New England* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1897), 10-12.

²⁸Chet, 81-82.

In the spring of 1690 as French and Indian raids continued to devastate the New England countryside, Massachusetts transitioned to the offense. Massachusetts Provost Marshall Sir William Phips led an expedition comprised of seven hundred men and fourteen ships against the Canadian port of Port Royale. Catching the seventy man garrison unprepared and outnumbered, the French defenders capitulated and Phips forces quickly seized and subsequently sacked the town. He returned to Boston just three weeks after departing in triumph with prisoners of war and a significant amount of captured stores.²⁹ His victory led Massachusetts to make some dangerous assumptions on the state of the French defenses elsewhere. Flushed with success, the colonies planed a more ambitious joint venture to take all of Canada. A combined force of New Englanders, New Yorkers and Iroquois allies would attack overland to Montreal, while Phips led a seaborne force to take Quebec. The overland force led by General Fitz John Winthrop of Connecticut made it only as far as Lake George before turning back.³⁰ Phips suffered issues of his own and did not arrive at Quebec until 5 October 1690. The aborted overland mission combined with his late start gave the commander at Quebec, Count Louis de Buade de Frontenac adequate time to bolster Quebec's defenses, bringing reinforcements from Montreal. Phips expedition was poorly supplied and did not expect to meet strong resistance.³¹ Unaware of the impending failure of the overland campaign,

²⁹Howard Henry Peckham, *The Colonial Wars: 1689-1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), 31.

³⁰Viola F. Barnes, "The Rise of William Phips," *The New England Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (July 1928): 290.

³¹Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars*, 63-64.

Massachusetts assumed a quick victory and expected Phips to resupply his forces with captured spoils of war.

Despite his weaker position, Phips was not about to turn back his fleet of thirty-two ships and twenty-three hundred sailors and New England militiamen without attempting an attack on the city. His decision to attack was further fueled by faulty intelligence that led him to believe that the city was ill prepared for an attack. Faced with stiff opposition and dwindling supplies, Phips called off the attack and returned to Massachusetts before his supplies ran out.³² Combat losses were minimal, but the return trip was far less forgiving to Phips' expedition. Unusually stormy weather wrecked one ship off the Island of Anitcosti killing more than thirty men. Three or four ships never returned and over two-hundred men died of small-pox.³³ Furthermore, Massachusetts credited the expedition on the assumption that spoils of war cover its costs. Instead, Massachusetts added a debt of fifty thousand pounds and for the first time had to issue paper currency to pay its debts.³⁴ Although the war saw the largest provincial army yet fielded by Massachusetts, yet financial incentives and the promise of the spoils of war enticed most men to join instead of impressment.³⁵ The war continued until 1697 with the Treaty of Ryswick. The treaty returned ante bellum status quo and Port Royale reverted back to French control. After Phips' failed expedition to Quebec, Massachusetts fought a

³²Ibid.

³³Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America, A Series of Historical Narratives, Part Fifth* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1882), 283-284.

³⁴Ibid., 284.

³⁵Zelner, 217.

defensive war, with several small expeditions conducted operations throughout Maine. The taking of Port Royale convinced Massachusetts that expeditions consisting of militia could be successful, although the attack on Quebec also demonstrated the importance of logistical preparation.

Queen Anne's War (1702-1713)

Queen Anne's War saw the continued use of large provincial armies to conduct European-style offensive actions against the French. The savage frontier raids of King William's War continued as the French sought to depopulate Maine in an effort to expand their claims to the Kennebec River. After a decade of warfare with the French, Massachusetts under Governor Joseph Dudley sought to increase the efficiency of the militia through more centralized logistical planning. The colony also realized that it could not easily stem the tide of frontier raids from Canada. To defeat the French, it would be necessary to knock them from the continent. It also became increasingly clear that Massachusetts and New England could not do it alone and sought increased aid from England.

On 10 August 1703, five-hundred men under the command of the French Captain Alexandre Leneuf de Beaubassin launched a series of coordinated attacks on the frontier towns of Maine. English losses totaled one-hundred and sixty killed or captured.³⁶ The only bright spot on an otherwise bleak period was the determined stand of the garrison at Fort Casco led by local militia leader, Major John March. Vastly outnumbered, he held

³⁶Francis Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1892), 1:44.

for three days until relief arrived.³⁷ Massachusetts mobilized her militia and by September had eleven hundred men available for service, half of which augmented garrisons throughout Massachusetts.³⁸ The colony managed to launch two punitive raids led by newly promoted Colonel March at against a suspected Indian village at Pigwacket (Fryeburg, Maine). The expeditions met with limited success, killing six Indians and capturing six, but did little to stem the waves of raids across the frontier.

In preparation for future offensive operations, Dudley created the office of the commissary-general to manage and standardize logistical requirements for the troops. He appointed Andrew Belcher, a former political rival, to the post and established the central supply depot at Fort Hill (Boston). He designated William Pepperell's garrison in Kittery, Maine as the supply depot for frontier forces. In doing so, he broke from the long established tradition that avoided centralized control of military resources. Usually required to cobble together resources on a case by case basis, the colony now had the ability to more quickly support offensive operations.

The following February, French led forces targeted the northern Massachusetts town of Deerfield. As the northernmost settlement in Massachusetts along the Connecticut River, Deerfield was a favorite target during previous wars. Long accustomed to Indian raids, the town was by most standards well prepared to fend off Indian attacks. A force of fifty French Canadians and two hundred Indians attacked in the early morning and overwhelmed the initial defenses of the town. In three hours of grim work, the French-led force killed fifty-three townspeople and captured an additional one

³⁷Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars*, 160.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 164.

hundred and eleven.³⁹ Of those taken, only sixty would return. The remainder either died during the trek, stayed in Canada as converted Catholics, or in some cases, Indian tribes simply absorbed them.⁴⁰ The French raid, known as the “Deerfield Massacre,” fueled public fears and sparked demands for revenge.

Colonel Benjamin Church, celebrated hero of King Phillip’s War, volunteered his services to lead an expedition on a retaliatory raid of both the French and their Indian allies. Dudley accepted Church’s offer and charged him with raising an expedition. Returning to Plymouth, Church raised a mixed force of five hundred and fifty English and Indians. Volunteers came forward to seek retribution, to serve with Church, or both. Regardless, Church boasted that his entire force consisted of volunteers. The value of Dudley’s logistical improvements quickly apparent as many of Church’s men received muskets recently imported from England to replace their worn and obsolete ones.⁴¹ Supported by two Royal Navy warships his expedition hunted for Indians along the coast from the Penobscot River to Port Royal. After raiding a few small French villages, Church’s force reached Port Royal. During a council of war, his officers deemed the fort too strong to attack and the expedition continued its trek north along the Bay of Fundy.⁴²

³⁹Francis Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, 1:64.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1:85. The story of the Deerfield Massacre and the subsequent captivity of some of the townspeople is told in a narrative of the minister of Deerfield, Reverend John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*. His son, Stephen Williams, eleven at the time of capture also wrote his narrative, *Account of the Captivity of Stephen Williams, Written by Himself*.

⁴¹Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars*, 194.

⁴²Benjamin Church, Thomas Church, and Samuel Gardner Drake, *The History of Philip's War, Commonly Called the Great Indian War, of 1675 and 1676: Also, of the*

After destroying the village of Beaubassin, Church's force retraced its route back to Boston. Results of the expedition were mixed. While it yielded roughly one hundred prisoners and destroyed a few small French villages, it did little to stop the frontier raids.⁴³

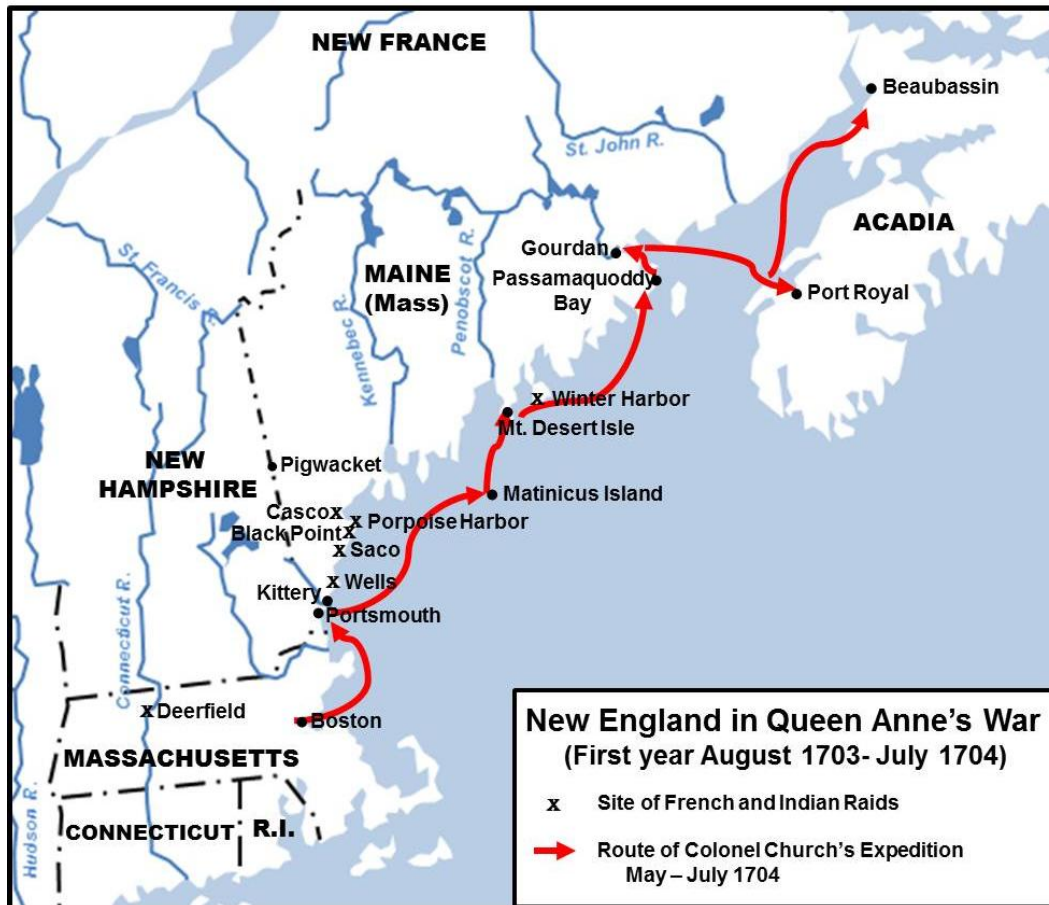


Figure 3. Queen Anne's War, 1703-1704
Source: Created by author.

French and Indian Wars at the Eastward, in 1689, 1690, 1692, 1696, and 1704 (Boston: Thomas B. Wait and Son, 1827), 280-281.

⁴³Peckham, 64.

After a brief lull, the French renewed hostilities in April 1706 with a new round of raids along the frontier. Eager to bring a decisive end to the war, Dudley lobbied London to conduct a large-scale invasion of Canada. After receiving limited interest in his plan from Britain, Dudley decided on an easier objective, the seizure of Port Royal. Strategically located on the Bay of Fundy, Port Royal allowed French warships to closely monitor trade and to chase off encroaching English fishermen. Governor Dudley raised two regiments of 1,076 soldiers including troops from Rhode Island and New Hampshire. He placed Colonel March, the hero of Fort Casco, in charge of the expedition. England even sent Colonel John Redknap, a Royal engineer, to advise the expedition on siege warfare. The assembled force sailed for Port Royal on 13 May 1707. March's forces conducted two landings, one in the north and one in the south. French skirmishers provided limited resistance and fell back to the fort. The garrison, commanded by Governor Daniel d'Auger de Subercase, soon found itself encircled by March's forces. Despite initial success, March found that besieging of a well fortified position was far different from back country Indian fighting.

Almost immediately, intense bickering broke out amongst the expedition's leadership. Arguments about who had responsibility of positioning the cannon delayed its deployment by three days. Subercase used this time to his advantage by strengthening the garrison, reported by French deserters to number four to five hundred troops and growing.⁴⁴ He also effectively employed skirmishers to harass the New Englanders. Unimpressed by the indecisive and divided leadership, troop morale plummeted. Bolstered by stories of Phips' expedition seventeen years prior, the men expected an easy

⁴⁴Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, 1:124.

victory, not a protracted fight. Desperate, Colonel March called for a series of indecisive councils of war. The council voted to abandon the siege one day and voted to resume it the next. Even the expedition's only regular officer, Colonel Redknapp, loudly declared the leadership incompetent and advocated abandonment of the siege. Finally, March relented and re-embarked his force on 6 June, after only a ten day siege. He returned in disgrace to Casco.⁴⁵

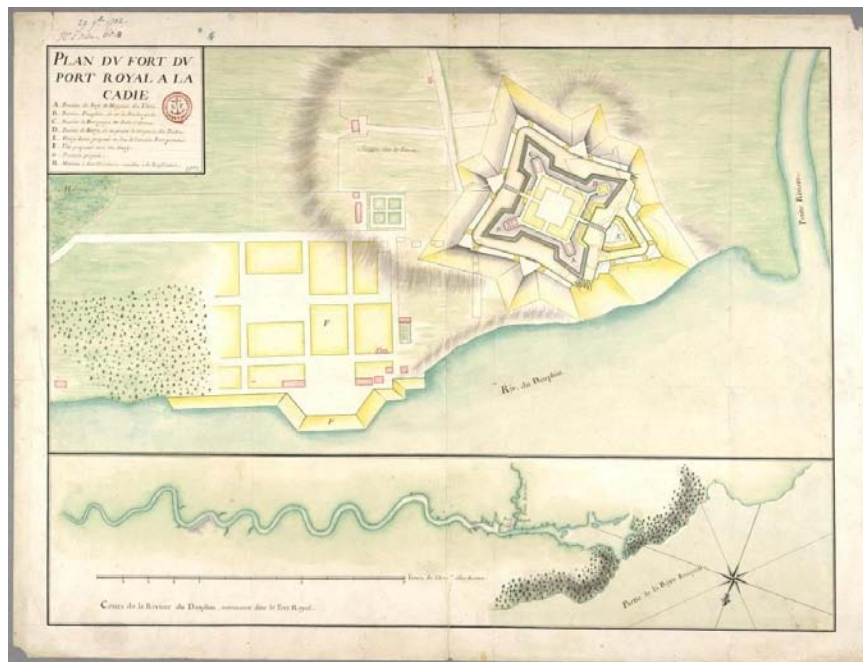


Figure 4. The Fort at Port Royal, Acadia, 1702.

Source: Jean de Labat. *A Military Engineering Map of the Fort at Port Royal, Acadia*. (Unknown, 1702).

Note: The orientation of the map is looking to the southeast.

Under intense political pressure, an enraged Governor Dudley ordered March to return to Port Royal. This time he sent three specially selected commissioners to advise

⁴⁵Samuel Adams Drake, *Colonial Wars*, 233.

him. Two additional companies of Maine militia replaced forces that deserted the expedition. When the force landed a second time on 10 August, they found the situation to be even worse. In the interim, Subercase built new field works in the positions occupied by the previous expedition. Subercase also stepped up his harassing attacks on the English force. Weakened by illness, Colonel March broke down and surrendered command to Colonel Francis Wainwright, one of the regimental commanders. After several days of inconclusive skirmishes, Wainwright made a final, strong feint towards the fort, hoping to draw out the garrison. Cautious of a trap, Subercase carefully sent out three successive detachments to ambush the English force. After strongly repulsing all three of Subercase's forces at the loss of sixteen men killed and an equal number wounded, the force re-embarked and returned to Boston.⁴⁶ Despite the offensives, French and Indian raids continued along the Massachusetts frontier.

After failing at Port Royal, Dudley redoubled his efforts to gain British support to end the Canadian threat. In 1709, Britain pledged a squadron with five regiments of regulars as part of a two-pronged attack on Canada, a revival of Phips' failed invasion plan of 1690. Despite significant American preparations, Britain had to divert the promised British troops to meet European requirements.⁴⁷ The following summer, London agreed to support a less ambitious expedition in Port Royal. The troops required for a full-scale Canadian invasion were no longer available. Departing on 18 September 1710, the combined force of four hundred British marines and fifteen hundred colonial

⁴⁶Ibid., 235.

⁴⁷Ibid., 253. Due to requirements in Europe, these forces were diverted to serve in Portugal.

troops heralded a new era of the war with Canada. This time, the British forces easily took the weakened French Fort and renamed it Annapolis Royal. With the fall of Port Royal, Acadia passed permanently into English hands.⁴⁸

In June of 1711, the British renewed their plan for the conquest of Canada with the arrival of five thousand regular troops and more than sixty ships. The largest army ever marshaled in the colonies. For its part of the expedition, New England was responsible for raising two regiments of men totaling fifteen hundred men.⁴⁹ Sailing towards Quebec that August, the fleet wandered into the breakers of Egg Island (Pointe-aux-Anglais) during one foggy night. The British fleet lost eight transports and two support ships with two hundred crew and 740 soldiers and camp followers.⁵⁰ The incident ended the expedition and the remaining British forces returned to England. The threat of New France to the continued expansion of the British colonies remained.

Summary

Decades of almost continuous fighting with Indians and French, led Massachusetts to institute militia reforms to meet increased demands of war. Requirements to build offensive operations as part of a greater colony-led strategy forced Massachusetts to develop addendums to the militia system to allow it to generate the necessary forces. Implementation of the draft structure allowed the colony to build larger forces. Finally, through increased experience, Massachusetts learned hard lessons about

⁴⁸Ibid., 261.

⁴⁹Ibid., 275. Massachusetts provided one thousand, one hundred and sixty men, New Hampshire one hundred, and Rhode Island two hundred and forty.

⁵⁰Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, 1:167-168.

building expeditionary forces and enabling them to operate away from the local support network which the militia traditionally relied upon.

In order to operate without a standing military force, Massachusetts had to rely on individuals to both serve in the militia and to furnish his own arms. But to employ the militia, the colony needed the town to organize, augment equipment, and provide for the soldier's functions within the town while he was performing active militia duties. The crux of the militia system, the colony also empowered the town with the power to impress soldiers when required. However, local and social factors made it far more convenient if they could convince men to volunteer instead of forcing them into service. The scope of the Pequot War remained small enough that the colony could still gather sufficient volunteers. By King Philip's War, the colony developed a greater reliance upon pressing men into service to fill the ranks. Whenever possible, the colony relied upon volunteers and provided increasing incentives to men to join voluntarily.

As the colony became more experienced at conducting European style warfare, it learned important lessons about sustaining expeditions. Phips' successfully took Port Royale because the garrison lacked the means to resist his overwhelming force. The subsequent plunder of the town resulted in profit for the colony and allowed the colony to then finance using credit, a subsequent attack on Quebec. Phips' sailed with a fleet poorly supplied for any length of siege, then failed without the assistance of the overland attack of Montreal. By the Queen Anne's war, Governor Dudley began a series of logistical reforms that ensured that future expeditions were adequately provisioned. The expeditions of Church and March demonstrated that the colony could sustain a force and enable its success. The normal demands of militia leaders did little to prepare the leaders

of provincial armies for larger-scale operations. Provincial army commanders had to learn on the fly as the expedition was in progress.

CHAPTER 3

EXPEDITIONS AND EUROPEAN INTERVENTION

Fortified towns are hard nuts to crack, and your teeth are not accustomed to it. Taking strong places is a particular trade, which you have taken up without serving an apprenticeship to it. Armies and veterans need skillful engineers to direct them in their attack. Have you any? But some seem to think that forts are as easy taken as snuff.

— Benjamin Franklin, 1745

Introduction

In the three decades prior to the American Revolution, Massachusetts continued to refine its ability to raise and support provincial armies. This era began with improbable success at Louisbourg and ended with Massachusetts in a comfortable rhythm of generating provincial armies. Funding from Britain enabled the colony to generate largely volunteer armies, targeting a population of men described by historian Fred Anderson as temporarily available for military service.⁵¹ While there was not a surplus of labor in Massachusetts, often young men chose military service as a way to earn a plot of land and what essentially amounted to startup money. While some raids occurred along the Massachusetts frontier, most of the militia's efforts during these wars were more precautionary than actual. With limited home defense requirements, the militia could better manage the compromise between local and colony manpower requirements. The last two wars with the French also employed a large percentage of the population at some time during the wars. It shaped a new generation of leaders for the colony. Men who

⁵¹Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Year's War* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985), 28.

served at Louisbourg led the colony during the Seven Years War. Similarly, that war provided many of the leaders of the American Revolution.

The decisive battle of King George's War, Massachusetts' triumph at Louisbourg was a product of many factors. Volunteerism was high, fueled by religious fervor, and local defense needs were minimal. The contribution by the Royal Navy, although often downplayed, was significant by both isolating Louisbourg and capturing critical supplies. William Pepperell provided solid leadership and in some cases, his subordinate leaders even demonstrated initiative. Finally, the expedition had some outright lucky breaks that overcame some deficiencies of the army. For Massachusetts, the Yankee spirit and ingenuity allowed an inexperienced army of farmers and fishermen to defeat well-entrenched regular troops. As spectacular as the victory was, it led Massachusetts to some dangerous conclusions on the capability of her militia.

After the first two years of the Seven Years War, the role of Massachusetts provincial armies declined to a supporting role to the British regulars. Providing armies on a relatively predictable schedule, Massachusetts became fairly proficient at assembling them. Conducted akin to a business transaction, enlistment contracts specified the duration, pay, and even the army's objective specified as part of the contract. Despite drawing criticism from British officers for its cost and inefficiency, the financial benefits of the provincial army enlistment system suited Massachusetts and its men well.

As the revolution flared in Boston, Maine initially was of little military interest to the British and many of its residents hoped they would gain some degree of protection by

the province's insignificance.⁵² Instead, Maine found itself once again the frontier between Massachusetts and British held Nova Scotia. Revolutionary incidents in Falmouth and Machais drew the attention of the Royal Navy and compounded by rampant privateer attacks off the Maine coast. By 1779, Royal Navy raids on the Maine coast posed challenges for the militia. It once again had to balance local defense needs with the needs of the colony.

King George's War (1744-1748)

The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht ushered in a long period of relative quiet along the English-French border. Some level of conflict was inevitable as the English continued to push the limits of the Maine frontier, further encroaching on Indian lands. Small-scale raids and counter-raids maintained the importance of the militia's vigilance, but this period lacked the large-scale offensives of Queen Anne's War. Although New France lost Annapolis Royal, it retained rights to Cape Breton Island, a key location that commanded the approaches to the St. Lawrence River. Construction of a Vauban-style fortress at Louisbourg began in 1720 and continued for the next twenty years.

March of 1744 saw the outbreak of the War of Austrian Succession in Europe and England and France mutually declared war against each other. The time required to deliver the news to America gave the French at Cape Breton a two-week head start over Massachusetts. Knowing this, the French military governor, Jean-Baptiste-Louis le Prévost Duquesnel, planned to catch the English garrisons at Canseau and Annapolis Royal off guard. His first target was the small English garrison at Canseau. Built on the

⁵²James S. Leamon, *Revolution Downeast: The War for American Independence in Maine* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1993), 74.

eastern shore of Acadia, it had access to excellent fishing and from a military standpoint was an excellent place from which the English could launch an attack on the fortress at Louisbourg. On 14 May, a six-hundred man force under the command of Captain Francois Duvivier surprised the eighty man garrison manning a meager wooden redoubt. The English surrendered providing the French returned them safely to Boston. Duvivier agreed to these conditions and after razing the village, made a fateful decision to send the Englishmen temporarily to Louisbourg.⁵³ A subsequent attack on Annapolis Royal failed after the British regulars of the garrison held out until a relief force arrived from Boston.⁵⁴

The French, true to their word, paroled the Caseau garrison back to Boston. One of the prisoners, Lieutenant John Bradstreet, informed the Massachusetts Governor, William Shirley about the state of Louisbourg. Bradstreet indicated significant gaps in the supposedly impregnable fortress. He estimated the garrison had only six hundred regulars with a further twelve hundred local militia that could be called into service. Furthermore, he reported that the fort was still lacking much of its cannon and the wall of the Grand Battery had two unrepaired breaches. Even more intriguing to Shirley was a mutiny of the mixed Swiss and French garrison that occurred in late December.⁵⁵ Louisbourg was in

⁵³Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, 2:104.

⁵⁴Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, 2:81-82. The reinforcements consisted of only fifty Indian rangers, but it was apparently enough to discourage the attackers. During the three week stalemate, Duvivier attempted to enlist the aid of the local Acadians in attacking the fort. Despite their French lineage, the Acadians remained cautiously neutral, providing him minimal support.

⁵⁵Fairfax Downey, *Louisbourg: Key to a Continent* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 49-52.

a weakened state and Shirley hoped to capitalize on this fleeting opportunity. Simultaneously, fishermen and merchants affected by French ships operating from the French fortress echoed the call for an attack on Louisbourg. William Vaughan, a merchant from the Maine coast, championed the cause and assisted Shirley in providing political pressure needed to make an attack a reality.

Improbable Victory at Louisbourg

In January of 1745, Governor Shirley swore the Massachusetts Assembly to an oath of secrecy and outlined an ambitious attack plan for Louisbourg. After several days of deliberation, the court voted against the proposal. Yet news of the plan soon leaked to the public. Vaughan circulated a petition amongst the merchants who served to gain both by the removal of Louisbourg and in supplying the expedition. Gaining the signatures of many influential Boston merchants, he convinced the assembly to reconsider the matter. For his part, Shirley vigorously defended the plan during a day of lively debate in the assembly. The second measure passed by one vote.⁵⁶

Shirley's next task was to build the invasion force. Calls for support went to neighboring colonies as far south as Pennsylvania. In addition to troops, the expedition would need ships and supplies. He sent duplicate requests for naval support to Commodore Peter Warren operating in the West Indies and to London. Warren declined to support the expedition until orders arrived from London several weeks later. Reactions from the other colonies were mixed. Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey

⁵⁶Samuel Adams Drake, *The Taking of Louisburg, 1745* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1890), 54-55. The measure might have failed except that one of the members of the opposition fell and broke his leg while rushing to cast his vote. Without this delegate, the vote ended in a tie, broken by the Speaker who carried the measure.

promised to supply troops. Reluctantly, Pennsylvania supplied provisions for the expedition, while New Jersey provided provisions and clothing. New York loaned the expedition ten heavy cannon, which Massachusetts was sorely lacking.⁵⁷

To lead the expedition, Shirley selected William Pepperrell, the forty-nine year old president of the Massachusetts Council and militia colonel from Kittery, Maine. Although Pepperrell lacked military experience, he was popular and successful businessman and known to be a steady man who displayed common sense.⁵⁸ Perhaps more significant to Shirley, Pepperrell lacked political ambition and he could count on him to follow orders closely. Accepting the appointment as a lieutenant general, Pepperrell committed himself to the task, advancing much of his personal finances to the treasury and paying for his regiment's bounties out of his own pocket.⁵⁹ His second in command, would be Major General Roger Wolcott, of Connecticut and his third in command was Brigadier General Samuel Walden, also of Maine.

Recruiting within New England proceeded with considerable success. Within two months, the expedition raised eight regiments of 3,250 men from Massachusetts, one from Connecticut with 516 men, and one from New Hampshire of 304 men. One hundred and fifty men additional men from New Hampshire served under Massachusetts while Rhode Island provided 240 men in three companies and a guard sloop. Largely due to Pepperrell's influence, a third of the Massachusetts force, three regiments, came from

⁵⁷Ibid., 56-57.

⁵⁸Ibid., 60.

⁵⁹Ibid., 63.

exclusively from Maine.⁶⁰ The clergy also gave an unexpected boost to the expedition. Enthusiasm from the Great Awakening boiled over into the expedition. Many of the clergy began equating the expedition as a “crusade” against the Catholic French. The Latin motto embroidered on the expedition’s read, “Never despair, Christ is with us.”⁶¹ Enthusiasm for the expedition not only brought in volunteers in sizable numbers, it also brought in members from all professions and social status. With little action along the frontier, the militia could spare many of her men. Shirley appealed to Admiral Peter Warren operating in the Caribbean to support the operation, but he could not offer his support until orders came from England.

On 24 March 1745, the expedition departed Boston. While still lacking in supplies, the General Court deemed the expedition sufficiently prepared to depart. Ice would soon start breaking up around Louisbourg and concerns of the expedition’s secrecy outweighed the missing supplies. The force sailed to the rendezvous point, at Caseau harbor, arriving in early April. Much to the delight of the land force, on 23 April, Commodore Warren arrived with a fleet of four British warships. After communicating with Pepperrell, Warren added the provincial warships at Caseau to his command and sailed north to establish a blockade of Louisbourg. With his forces assembled, Pepperrell now waited for the ice to break up to allow movement to the fort. During idle time at Caseau Pepperrell drilled the troops and formed them into divisions for the attack.⁶²

⁶⁰Henry Burrage, *Maine at Louisburg in 1745* (Augusta, ME: Burleigh and Flynt, 1910), 21.

⁶¹Samuel Adams Drake, *The Taking of Louisburg*, 64-65. The motto was suggested by George Whitefield, one of the major players in the First Great Awakening.

⁶²Parkman, *A Half Century of Conflict*, 2:111.

The plan of attack was simple but relied heavily on precision timing. Success also hinged on a total surprise provided by Warren's blockade of the port. Landings had to begin exactly at nine in the evening to allow the troops to be unloaded by midnight. The four divisions would march to the walls of Louisbourg and scale the walls under the cover of darkness. Arrival any later than nine made an attack before dawn impossible. Arrival too early would mean losing the element of surprise. If unable to surprise the enemy, Shirley directed Pepperrell to call a council of war and proceed from there.⁶³

Departing on the morning of 29 April under favorable winds, winds shifted later in the day and delayed arrival until nine o'clock the following morning. Although the element of surprise lost, Pepperrell conducted a successful feint with his landing force, putting the French reception party out of position for the actual landings a mile down shore. Once ashore the English easily repulsed belated French opposition consisting of a mere seventy-five soldiers. Pepperrell completed his landing unopposed by the next day, 1 May. That night Lieutenant Colonel Vaughn, an original advocate of the expedition, led four hundred men on a reconnaissance of the Grand Battery.

During the reconnaissance, Vaughn's force set fire to some houses in the vicinity of the battery. The winds blew smoke into the battery and obscured Vaughn's forces. Unable to see the size of the New England force, French officers feared the militia would overrun the battery by attacking through the breaches in the wall. They ordered their men to abandon the battery. Although they spiked the thirty heavy cannon, an engineer convinced the officers not to blow-up the battery. The next morning, Vaughn's men took over the unoccupied battery. The captured guns were an unexpected windfall for the

⁶³Burrage, 24.

American force. Calling forward tools to extract the spikes, the New Englanders feverously labored to get the guns back into action. The next day, the Yankees repulsed a French attempt to retake the battery. By 4 May, the first three cannon went into action against the French. Larger than those brought by the expedition, several captured guns made it to the trenches to augment the main lines.⁶⁴

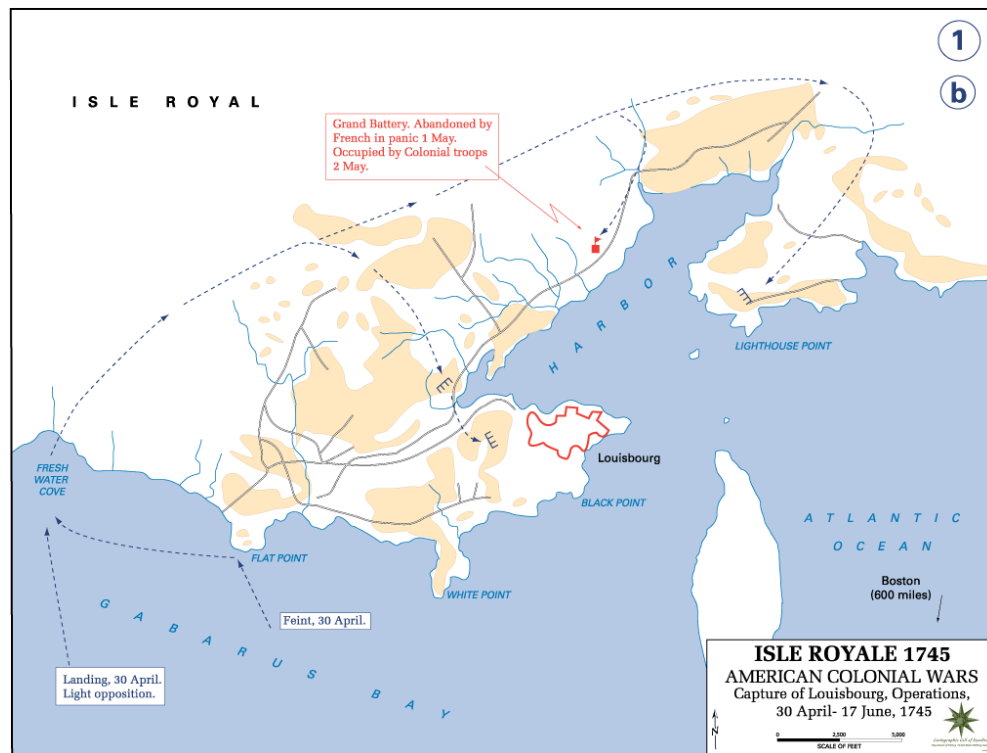


Figure 5. Capture of Louisbourg

Source: United States Military Academy History Department, Colonial Wars Atlas Series, <http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/web03/atlas/colonial%20wars/> ColonialWars GIFS/LouisbourgCapture.gif (accessed 24 February 2011).

⁶⁴Peckham, 102-103.

Pepperrell began a slow encirclement of the fort with his cannon, inching his lighter batteries gradually closer to the fortress. Although able to place increasingly effective fires on the fortress, he still believed he needed the support of Warren's fleet. However, for Warren the reduction of the Island Battery, which commanded the harbor, was a precondition for his support. On 26 May, eager to break the stalemate, Pepperrell ordered a night attack on the Island Battery. Alert sentries detected the attackers as they rowed towards the battery. In a pitched battle, the French repelled the assault, costing them sixty killed and one hundred and nine captured.⁶⁵ Despite the setback, the New Englanders stumbled upon thirty cannon below the low-water mark at Lighthouse Point on the opposite side of the harbor. Using the newly discovered cannon, the Americans established a new battery on Lighthouse Point. Once in action on 11 June the battery devastated the Island Battery forcing its evacuation.⁶⁶

Even before the reduction of the Island Battery, conditions within Louisbourg began to decline rapidly. Pepperrell's batteries continued to inch closer to the walls, raking the town with incessant cannon and musket fire, making daytime movement for the French defenders impossible. Meanwhile, Warren's blockade successfully captured several French resupply ships. The capture of these ships provided critical supplies to the Yankee army, while further dampening the morale of the French garrison. When the French abandoned the Island Battery on 11 June, Warren's ships were able to move freely around the harbor. By 14 June, his full fleet, augmented by several captured French warships anchored within the harbor. With defeat imminent, the French commander sued

⁶⁵Ibid., 104.

⁶⁶Samuel Adams Drake, *The Taking of Louisburg*, 116-117.

for terms. After a day of negotiations, Pepperrell received the fortress from Governor Louis Duchambon.⁶⁷

Cooperation between Pepperrell and Warren was a key component for success. The expedition could not succeed without both the land and naval components. Although Warren was often impatient with Pepperrell, who was perhaps overly methodical and cautious, his blockade isolated Louisbourg from seaborne resupply. Captured ships provided critical supplies of food and ammunition that allowed Pepperrell to continue his siege. For his part, Pepperrell knew the importance of the reducing the Island Battery and labored diligently to do so. Despite cooperation exhibited during the battle, relations between the two deteriorated over surrender related issues.

While New England's losses were 131 to combat and illness, fever and dysentery left fifteen hundred men unfit for duty in the final days of the attack.⁶⁸ Another 890 men assigned to garrison the fort would die over the next year due to disease.⁶⁹ Pepperrell returned to a hero's welcome and received a baronet from the King. Warren received a promotion to Admiral and an appointment as the Governor of Louisbourg. More importantly for Massachusetts, the crown agreed to reimburse the colony for its expenses incurred during the expedition. This was crucial, as the terms of the Louisbourg surrender allowed the French to retain their property and consequently there were no spoils of war to offset the expedition's enormous costs. Louisbourg was the only major battle of the

⁶⁷Ibid., 118-120.

⁶⁸Burrage, 108. Estimates are in Pepperrell's letter to the Duke of Newcastle, dated 18 July 1745.

⁶⁹Peckham, 106.

war. Frontier raids and the construction of a new string of Massachusetts forts characterized the remainder of the war. For New England, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 was a double edged sword. While it ended the war, Britain ceded Louisbourg to the French in exchange for the city of Madras in the Indian Ocean.

Massachusetts and the Seven Years War (1754-1763)

In the fall 1753, Britain warned Governor William Shirley of possible French incursions in Maine along the upper Kennebec River as part of a general French effort to expand territory in frontier regions.⁷⁰ Added to ongoing French “encroachments” into the Ohio Valley and Nova Scotia, Massachusetts had cause for alarm. Governor Shirley was familiar with getting Massachusetts into a wartime footing. He ordered a reconnaissance of the upper Kennebec for signs of French encroachments and requested the General Court to raise an expedition of five hundred men. French influence on the upper Kennebec River could quickly expand down the coast, effectively cutting off the eastern portion of the Maine province.

As he formed an expedition under the command of Colonel John Winslow, Shirley worked to secure the neutrality of the Indian tribes in Maine. In late June, he held a meeting with the Penobscot and Norridgewalk Indians and explained the reasons he intended to build a fortification along the Kennebec River. While the news of additional

⁷⁰Charles Henry Lincoln, ed., *Correspondence of William Shirley, Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 2:12-13. Warning came from Britain directing Shirley to prepare to defend against possible attack, yet cautioned him of “His Majesty’s determination not to be the aggressor.”

encroachment of settlers was unwelcome, Shirley did secure their reluctant acceptance.⁷¹ Meanwhile, Colonel Winslow found his eight-hundred man expedition poorly equipped. Only 197 men owned suitable arms and he needed the assistance of the General Court to secure a loan of three-hundred weapons.⁷² Winslow's expedition found no evidence of French settlement on the Kennebec. He built Fort Halifax overlooking the juncture of the Kennebec and Sebasticook River to defend the region and left a small garrison to secure the fort. Winslow returned to Boston late that summer without seeing and evidence of French presence in the region.

Despite a lack of French presence in Maine, Shirley warned of greater dangers. He warned that French efforts were underway to sway the Indians of the Six Nations away from the English. To counteract this growing influence, he emphasized the need for a union between all the English Governments in North-America . . . necessary for their mutual defense."⁷³ Although New England colonies cooperated militarily often, military cooperation with New York was new. During winter of 1753-1754, England took a keen interest in events within the colonies. The British strategy called for coordinated colonial action French encroachments in Nova Scotia, upstate New York at both Crown Point and Niagara, and along the Ohio River Valley. While Major General Edward Braddock, the commander in chief of all English forces, would lead the expedition in the Ohio River

⁷¹James P. Baxter, ed., *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Portland, ME: Lefavor-Tower Co., 1908), 12:300. Governor Shirley recounts the events of his meeting with the Indian tribes in a letter to Sir Thomas Robinson, the British Secretary of State for the Southern Department.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 281-282.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 331.

Valley. Governor Shirley, appointed second in command, coordinated colonial efforts on the other three objectives.⁷⁴ Promising financial support from Britain, Shirley convinced the General Court to approve two thousand men for a joint British expedition in Nova Scotia and fifteen hundred men for an expedition on Crown Point.⁷⁵ Other colonies followed Massachusetts in committing troops for the Crown Point Expedition. He later siphoned some of those troops for a third expedition to Niagara.

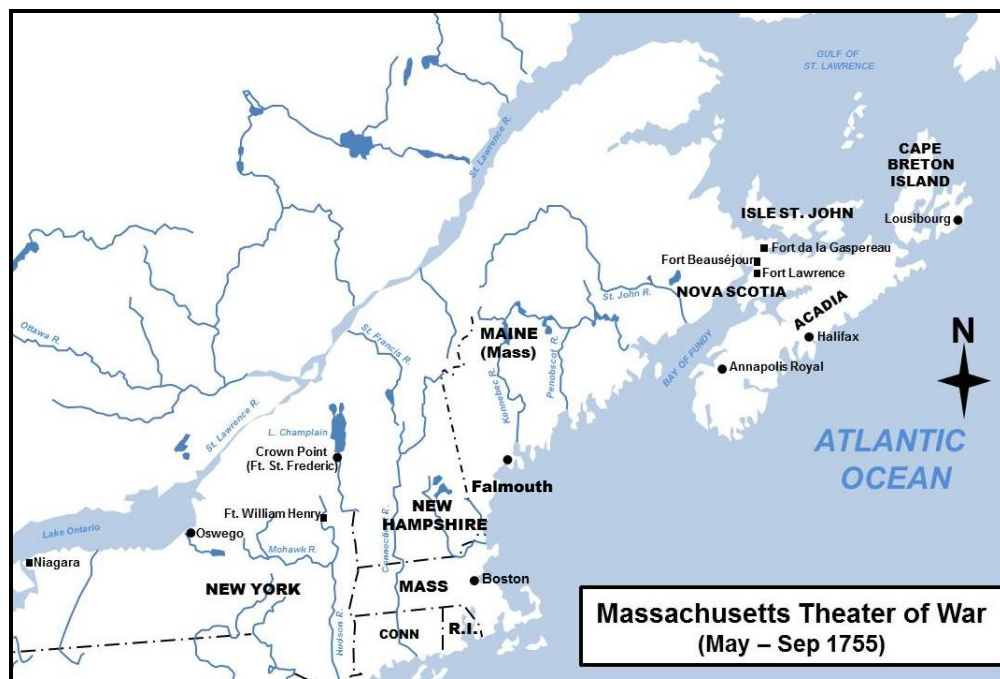


Figure 6. Massachusetts Theater of War 1755

Source: Created by author.

⁷⁴Stanley Pargellis, *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 35-36.

⁷⁵Anderson, *A People's Army*, 10.

Widespread shortages in arms, provisions and equipment exacerbated by the competition between the three expeditions caused delays. First to depart was Lieutenant Colonel John Winslow's expedition to Nova Scotia. Joining with the British regulars garrisoned there, the expedition successfully took two French forts and later participated in the resettlement of the Arcadians from Nova Scotia.⁷⁶ The defeat of General Braddock in June and logistical delays limited the success of the two campaigns in New York. Abandoning the plan to attack Nigeria, the expedition built a series of fortifications in the vicinity of Oswego on the eastern end of Lake Ontario. The Crown Point Expedition, which saw the only major battle involving New Englanders at the Battle of Lake George, stalled soon thereafter. While Massachusetts men performed well during the battle, they had a tenuous relationship with the New York commander, William Johnson. Rivalries between New England militia and New York militia sometimes became violent. These would be the last major expeditions led by colonial commanders. The following year Britain took over coordinating the war.

In January of 1756, the Newcastle administration removed Governor Shirley as Commander in Chief of British forces in the colonies and replaced him with John Campbell, the fourth earl of Loudoun. A professional soldier, Loudoun lacked Shirley's understanding of the colonial political system. He demanded compliance from the colonies and in general refused to negotiate or compromise to gain the support of their governments. Loudoun sought to centralized command of the colonial forces. Unlike Shirley, he also demanded colonies fund their own soldiers and refused to promise

⁷⁶Peckham, 143. Many New Englanders would return later to settle the lands taken from the Arcadians.

reimbursement for war-related expenses. Having brought several regiments of regulars with him, he saw the provincials as primarily auxiliary troops to support his regulars. Colonial military commanders fell under British commanders regardless of rank and for the first time were subject to British martial discipline. He also found that provincial troops were expensive and inefficient.

Consequently, Massachusetts's support to the war effort declined. In 1758, William Pitt recalled Loudoun and renewed offers to the Massachusetts Assembly for compensation for war expenses. Yet even with Pitt's generous financial support, Massachusetts reimbursements only covered about two-fifths of the colony's total war costs. Province taxes would remain elevated at wartime levels until 1770 to pay off the colony's debts incurred during the war.⁷⁷

During the Seven Years War, Massachusetts streamlined its recruitment practices. Volunteers normally enlisted for a six to eight month period and by law could not be compelled to serve beyond twelve. They normally received a bounty equivalent of anywhere from one to eight-months pay upon enlistment and received the balance of their pay at the end of the enlistment. Once the General Court approved force requirements for the upcoming summer campaigns, normally in February, the governor appointed the commanding colonels. The colonels would then appoint their subordinate officers, usually based on their ability to enlist men into service. In 1755, a captain was to recruit fifty men, while lieutenants and ensigns raised twenty-five and fifteen men respectively.⁷⁸ While the preponderance of the enlistments were voluntary, the provisions of –An Act for

⁷⁷Anderson, *A People's Army*, 14-16.

⁷⁸Ibid., 39-40.

Levying Soldiers” passed in April of 1754 gave authority and procedures to levy of troops.⁷⁹ Before resorting to impressment, the local militia commanders mustered their regiments and asked for volunteers for one last time. Failing this, idle militia units provided soldiers to meet the quota. A 1756 survey of Massachusetts troops conducted by John Winslow found that approximately ninety percent volunteered for service while impressed soldiers accounted for only 2.2 percent. The remaining 247 men were hired substitutes. According to laws established in 1754, men could hire a substitute at whatever rate they could negotiate in exchange for a fine of five pounds to the province.⁸⁰

Following the expeditions of 1755, Massachusetts troops served primarily as auxiliary troops to the British regulars. They performed support tasks, such as the digging of trenches, hauling cannon, and other menial tasks.⁸¹ The annual reforming and then disbanding of regiments made for a very inefficient and inexperienced military force. While increased re-enlistment bounties sought to induce some level of continuity, provincial armies, raised for a sole expedition or mission, remained newly formed organizations year after year. The experience of the war defined the current generation of New Englanders. Of even greater impact, the war erased the French threat that plagued New England for the last half century allowing for unprecedented growth along the frontier.

⁷⁹Massachusetts, *The Acts And Resolves, Public And Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay: To Which Are Prefixed The Charters of the Province* (Boston: Albert J. Wright, 1878), 3:734-738. See also, Anderson, *A People's Army*, 41.

⁸⁰Anderson, *A People's Army*, 52-53.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 143.

The Rebellion Comes to the Maine Frontier

The defeat of the French in Canada finally brought peace and stability to the Maine frontier. This allowed land proprietors to secure land grants and subsequently recruit families to settle their lands. Massachusetts encouraged immigration to Maine because it served to relieve overcrowding in the older towns around Boston. Maine land also served to inexpensively reward the province's soldiers for their service. The Proclamation Line established by Parliament that effectively closed off the western borders of the colonies, further encouraged movement to Maine and Nova Scotia. Maine's population, estimated at 20,000 in 1760 more than doubled to 47,767 by 1776.⁸² Townships limited by the incessant frontier warfare of the previous half-century exploded from twenty-one in 1750, to over one-hundred and forty by 1775. York County, which once encompassed all of Maine, split into three in 1760, adding Cumberland and Lincoln counties.⁸³ Maine's relationship with Massachusetts remained very colonial in nature and Maine still depended on Massachusetts for its supplies. Maine shipped raw goods of lumber, fish, and wood to Massachusetts in exchange for finished goods.

Maine's reprieve ended with its involvement in the American Revolution. Although there was little strategic value to Maine, several incidents coupled with ongoing privateer attacks developed into an antagonistic relationship with the Royal Navy. Despite an embargo to British trade established by Massachusetts, several enterprising loyalists sought to circumvent its enforcement. The first event occurred in Falmouth in

⁸²David P. Coulson and Linda Joyce, *United States State-Level Population Estimates: Colonization to 1999* (Fort Collins, CO: US Department of Agriculture, 2003), 38.

⁸³Leamon, 6.

the spring of 1755. Local merchant, Thomas Coulson, received a vessel from England loaded with sails, rigging, and equipment for a ship he was constructing. A violation of the embargo, the town's authorities ordered the ship return to England. Unwilling to give up the valuable cargo, Coulson requested assistance from the royal authorities who dispatched the H.M.S. *Canceaux* under the command of Lieutenant Henry Mowat to Falmouth. Under the protection of the *Canceaux*, Coulson downloaded the cargo and completed his new ship.

A militia leader, Samuel Thompson, developed a plan to capture first Mowat and then the *Canceaux*. While he succeeded in the first, he could not accomplish the second. Meanwhile, his actions threw Falmouth in an uproar. Townspeople, fearing retribution from the second in command on the *Canceaux* pleaded for Mowat's release. While Falmouth's militia was largely absent having already departed to join the American army at Cambridge, some six-hundred militia from neighboring towns arrived to oppose Thompson. Out of options, Thompson released Mowat and the townspeople profusely apologized. Mowat seemed to understand and departed a few days later with Coulson's new vessel. Despite the violation of the embargo, the residents of Falmouth thought they were safe from further British action, although as it turned out, only temporarily.⁸⁴

A few weeks later, a similar but more significant event unfolded further west in the small town of Machias. Ichabod Jones, a loyalist merchant, appealed to the British General Thomas Gage, offering badly needed lumber and firewood in exchange for an armed escort. Gage agreed, dispatching the 50-ton schooner the H.M.S. *Margaretta* under

⁸⁴Joseph Conforti, ed., *Creating Portland: History and Place in Northern New England* (Lebanon, N.H.: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 56-58.

the command of Midshipman James Moore to escort Jones' ships to Boston. This time, local patriots proved more successful, capturing the *Margaretta* after a brief naval skirmish and also took two other Royal Navy ships sent to investigate the *Margaretta's* disappearance.

Embarrassed by these incidents, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves decided to take more direct action against the provincials. He ordered a punitive expedition under the command of Lieutenant Mowat, the victim of provincial action in Falmouth. His instructions to Mowat were specific.

My Design is to chastise Marblehead, Salem, Newbury Port, Cape Anne Harbour, Portsmouth, Ipswich, Saco, Falmouth in Casco Bay, and particularly Mechais [sic] where the *Margaretta* was taken, the Officer commander her killed, and the People made Prisoners, and where the *Diligent* Schooner was seized and the Officers and Crew carried Prisoners up the Country, and where preparations I am informed are now making to invade the Province of Nova Scotia.⁸⁵

Mowat soon found he was unable to attack many of the towns because they were too dispersed or that the winds were wrong for entering the harbor. As a result, only Falmouth received the wrath of the expedition. After allowing the townspeople time to vacate, he destroyed 130 homes and buildings and destroyed or captured fifteen ships anchored in the harbor.⁸⁶

Machias, who had escaped punishment, remained at the center of revolutionary action in Maine. Situated on the eastern edge of Maine, it became a haven for Nova Scotians, who were sympathetic to the American cause. In 1776 and again in 1777, small

⁸⁵William Bell Clark, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), 2:324-326. Vice Admiral Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat, Boston, 6 October 1775.

⁸⁶James P. Baxter, ed., *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Portland, ME: Lefavor-Tower Co., 1910), 16:305-310.

expeditions departed Machias in the hope of inciting a revolution in Nova Scotia. While both sought support of the Continental Congress and Massachusetts, they received little from either. The first, led by Jonathan Eddy departed for Fort Cumberland in late October raised a one-hundred and eighty man force of New Englanders, Indians, and Nova Scotians. Despite taking a small outpost and seizing a British sloop cause in the tidal flats below the fort, a relief force drove him off.⁸⁷ The second expedition led by John Allan received support from the Continental Congress who authorized Massachusetts to raise a force of three thousand men to seize Fort Cumberland and the Royal Navy dockyards at Halifax. Massachusetts proved to be far less enthusiastic about the venture. A similar British expedition designed to consolidate their control of the St. John area forced Allen to set out early with only forty men, which did little to stop the British operation.⁸⁸

Allen's major contribution to the revolution was not his expedition to Nova Scotia, but rather in his capacity as the Continental superintendent for the Eastern Indians. His efforts over the next several years ensured that the local Indians, the Penobscots, Malecites, and Passamaquoddies remained largely neutral. As both sides courted the tribes, the Indians remained neutral despite British advantages in employing greater resources and the services of French Anglican priests. For the Indians, they managed not only to maintain their neutrality; they managed to secure presents and provisions from both sides.⁸⁹ Despite their neutrality, the Americans benefited the most from the arrangement, securing their borders from overland attack.

⁸⁷Leamon, 89-91.

⁸⁸Ibid., 90-91.

⁸⁹Ibid., 98-99.

Despite its dispersed population and limited economic means, the patriots and privateers of Maine attracted British attention. As the hotbed of the Maine revolutionary movement, Machais not only saw the seizure of the *Margaretta*, but also served as a base of operations for two failed Nova Scotia expeditions. Massachusetts' large privateer fleet also took a heavy toll on British resupply ships that travelled between Halifax and New York.⁹⁰ By building a base on the Maine coast, Britain could keep privateering in check and maintain a close eye on activity in Machais.

Summary

The siege of Louisbourg was New England's most successful military expedition conducted to date. Using the support of the Royal Navy, Massachusetts proved it could plan, equip, and lead a large conventional campaign. Massachusetts now possessed the manpower and resources to generate and field an army. Yet it also marked the beginning of increased British involvement and management of the English colonies. British reimbursement of the campaign made the war enormously beneficial for Massachusetts and reversed decades of inflation. Unbeknownst to the leaders of the colony, this was the first step in making Massachusetts part of a larger English strategy for global power.

The Seven Years War marked the introduction of British control in military affairs. Aside from the opening campaigns, Massachusetts took on the role as a force provider instead of a director of the war. For the militia, the demands of the war streamlined the system the colony used to generate its provincial armies. Massachusetts used crown funding to gain volunteers through enlistment bounties. Yet reliance on

⁹⁰Jack Coggins, *Ships and Seamen of the American Revolution* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 74.

volunteers made its armies more subject to the demands of the individual soldier. In order to convince a man to volunteer, the colony had to provide financial incentives and set terms of enlistments. The result was armies and expeditions that came with their own limitations of set enlistment timelines and when possible financial bounties. Although not efficient or ideal from the view of the colony or a military commander, it allowed the colony to generate forces it needed from the militia that could expand or contract as the conditions changed.

CHAPTER 4

THE PENOBSCOT EXPEDITION

We had now been here five or six days and the troops were not landed. A general uneasiness pervaded all ranks, both among the sailors and soldiers, something must be wrong. Our General was said to be a very good sort of man, but these good sort of men seldom make good generals.

— Thomas Philbrook

Introduction

Although impressive its size, the Penobscot Expedition represented a capability that Massachusetts developed over a century of warfare with the French and eastern Indians. The establishment of a British outpost in Maine was not only a military threat, but it threatened Massachusetts' claim to region. Massachusetts, confident in its abilities, assembled the Penobscot Expedition without Continental involvement. In most cases, it was justly founded in its abilities, but ultimately overestimated the capability of the Maine militia. The story of the expedition illustrates the ability of the colony, but also highlights inherent flaws in the militia system as well. Coupled with weak and often decisive leaders, the expedition ended in failure.

Plans for New Ireland

On 16 June 1779, fourteen year-old William Hutchings, a resident of the Bagaduce peninsula, witnessed the arrival of a large British force. Eight-hundred British soldiers under the command of Brigadier General Francis McLean arrived with orders to establish a permanent garrison on the Penobscot River. The next day, the British force began fortifying positions on the peninsula. Anchoring the defenses was Fort George,

located on the central plateau that dominated the peninsula. The British decision to establish the base on the Penobscot was the product of a series of personal, political, and strategic considerations on both sides of the Atlantic. A base on the Penobscot River brought about serious issues for the Maine Province and its parent colony, Massachusetts. The Bay Colony's rapid response to the crisis would ultimately lack both the ability and the will to drive the British out. In the process, the expedition would nearly financially ruin the colony and further divided the citizens within its eastern province.

Establishing an outpost along the Maine coast, although difficult to support, would solve some of Britain's military challenges. It would serve to protect Nova Scotia by both interdicting American privateers that preyed upon British shipping in the Bay of Fundy and would isolate Machais. As a haven for revolutionary Nova Scotian refugees Machais, already launched two failed expeditions designed to rally local support against the British. Privateer attacks along the shipping lanes between Halifax and New York were significant enough to cause Britain to adopt a convoy system to protect its supply lines, drawing off limited naval resources. In a sense, an outpost in Maine would serve as a buffer between New England and Nova Scotia. Additionally, the British politicians recognized that possession of the Penobscot may allow Britain to lay claim to the area if the war ended in a rebel victory.⁹¹

As convincing as the military argument may be, the true impetus behind the outpost was both personal and political. Boston loyalists, John Nutting and Dr. John Calef saw an opportunity for personal gain in establishing an outpost on the Penobscot River. Despite the phenomenal growth in Maine's population following the French and

⁹¹Leamon, 106.

Indian War, land grants east of the Penobscot were difficult to gain. Maine's forests provided prized tall, straight naval timbers used to build masts. In fact, all such timbers in Maine were generally claimed by the crown, but increased settlement east of the Penobscot made enforcement more difficult. Calef had long sought to gain royal grants for the lands along the Penobscot while Nutting, a successful builder, began to speculate in lands along the Penobscot to build a large lumber enterprise.⁹² Both stood to gain immensely if Britain established a foothold in the region and they could legitimize their claims.

A staunch loyalist, Nutting, evacuated with the British Army from Boston to Halifax in March of 1776 and resumed his business there. He secured a position as a messenger and travelled to England. Once there, he developed a close relationship with William Knox, the secretary to Lord George Germain, the newly appointed Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs. Knox and Nutting then developed a plan to rally loyalist support in New England into a new colony, New Ireland, within the Maine province. Knox a loyalist from Georgia was sympathetic to the plan from the start. When presented the plan, Lord Germain approved it for both its military merits and as a potential solution to resettlement of the colonies' loyalist population. Using his role, in developing the overall plan, Nutting had significant input into the selection of a site along the Penobscot and not at a more developed coastal community such as Falmouth.⁹³ With his plan approved, he departed with the necessary orders for execution in September of 1778.

⁹²Ibid., 105.

⁹³Samuel F. Batchelder, *The Life and Surprising Adventures of John Nutting, Cambridge Loyalist and his Strange Connection with the Penobscot Expedition of 1779* (Cambridge, MA: unk, 1912), 75.

Unfortunately for Nutting, an American Privateer, the *Vengeance*, intercepted his ship. Wounded four times during the brief battle, Nutting managed to throw his dispatches overboard to prevent their capture.⁹⁴

While this dashed any hope of establishing a base prior to the end of the campaign season, fresh dispatches from England arrived in January of 1779. In April, General Henry Clinton in New York sent Nutting to Halifax to give his orders to General Francis McLean. Clinton orders to McLean were threefold:

Make such a Detachment of the Troops under your Command, as you shall judge proper and Sufficient to defend themselves against any Attempt the Rebels in those parts may be able to make, directing them to take post on Penobscot River, and sending with them all Necessary Implements for erecting a Fort, together with such Ordnance and Stores as may be proper for its defense, and a sufficient supply of Provisions.⁹⁵

Clinton estimated that it would take approximately 500 men under one of McLean's regimental commanders to accomplish this task, but left the final number to McLean. Concerned about the likelihood of an American counter-attack, McLean chose to lead the six-hundred and forty men of the 74th Foot and 82nd Foot himself.⁹⁶ Attached to his regiments were fifty men the Royal Artillery to man the four twelve, two six, and two four pounder cannon.⁹⁷ McLean was a sixty-two year old bachelor and veteran of

⁹⁴Ibid., 76.

⁹⁵Maine Historical Society, "Dispatch from General Henry Clinton to General Francis McLean on the Penobscot fort," <http://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/7475.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2011).

⁹⁶Benjamin Franklin Stevens, ed., *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London: Mackie & Co, 1904), 1:459. In a letter to General Clinton dated 26 June 1779, McLean describes the composition of his force.

⁹⁷Ibid., 460.

nineteen major battles that spanned Europe, the Caribbean, and Canada. He more recently spent fifteen years in Portugal as a military governor of several fortified cities along the Spanish border. Recalled from Portugal, McLean assumed duties the governor of Nova Scotia and inherited the problems of a growing crowd of Loyalist refugees.⁹⁸ He was uniquely qualified to administer the new garrison and potentially a new colony.

McLean's force from 74th and 82nd Foot consisted largely of untested soldiers recruited from Scotland the previous year. The 74th Foot, the Argyle Highlanders, formed in May of 1778 recruited predominately from the Argyleshire region. Raised by Colonel John Campbell, the regiment sailed for Halifax in August of 1778. Similarly, the 82nd Foot, —The Hamiltons” was raised in 1778 by the Duke of Hamilton and was equally untested by battle. William Hutchings described the British soldiers who conducted the initial landing on the peninsula as —frightened as a flock of sheep, and [they] kept looking around them as if they expected to be fired on by an enemy hid behind the trees.”⁹⁹ This would be the first action the two regiments. Although inexperienced, its soldiers had superior training and equipment when compared to their American counter-parts.

Providing naval support to McLean was Captain Henry Mowat commanding the HMS *Albany*. Mowat was extremely familiar with the intricacies of the Maine coast, serving the last thirteen years either chasing smugglers or privateers. He was infamous

⁹⁸George E Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition: Commodore Saltonstall and the Massachusetts Conspiracy of 1779* (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 2002),157.

⁹⁹George Augustus Wheeler. *History of Castine, Penobscot, and Brooksville, Maine: including the Ancient Settlement of Pentagöe* (Bangor, ME: Burr & Robinson, 1875), 322.

amongst the Maine coastal communities for his destruction of Falmouth four years earlier as the captain of the HMS *Canceaux*. Forty-five years old, he had been at sea since he was sixteen. A professional sailor, he took his commitment to the defense of McLean's outpost seriously. Originally his fourteen-gun *Albany* was the only sloop-of-war to remain behind to support McLean's outpost. The other two ships the *North* and the *Nautilus* had orders elsewhere. In a letter to General Clinton, he described his ship the *Albany* as —the worst calculated of any vessel in the King's service” and feared that —from the number of Rebel Ships now on this Coast, that not only the Albany but every Soldier on the Command [will fall] a Sacrifice.”¹⁰⁰ As a result of his efforts assisted by the pleas of General McLean, the sloops-of-war the HMS *North* and *Nautilus* remained at Penobscot, giving Mowat a total of three warships equipped with forty-four guns at his disposal.

Accompanying the military force was the civilian guides and advisors who helped bring this expedition to fruition. John Nutting who had often surveyed his lands along the Penobscot served initially as the expedition's pilot, guiding the ships up the river. Upon arrival, McLean appointed Nutting as the —Overseer of Works” coordinating the efforts of the local population that chose to help McLean's force.¹⁰¹ John Calef also joined the expedition as both the expedition's surgeon and acting chaplain.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Stevens, 462. Letter dated 27 June 1779 aboard the *Albany* in the Penobscot Mowat's assessment of the *Albany* was probably correct as in 1782 it was declared unfit for combat service and converted to prison ship.

¹⁰¹Batchelder, 82.

¹⁰²John Calef, ed., *The Siege of Penobscot by the Rebels* (1781; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1971), 10.

While some of the population fled upon the arrival of the British force, many remained cautiously neutral. The militia was ~~—~~most destitute of arms and ammunition” and failed to put up any semblance of a defense.¹⁰³ McLean immediately made a conciliatory offer to the local population, promising to ~~—~~extend our protection, and give every encouragement, to all persons whatever denomination, without any retrospect to their former behavior, who shall, within eight days from the date hereof, take the oaths of allegiance and fidelity to his Majesty.”¹⁰⁴ Approximately four-hundred and eighty inhabitants trekked to the British encampment to swear an oath. Approximately one-hundred of them assisted in clearing the woods in front of the fort.¹⁰⁵

Massachusetts Responds

Within days, letters bearing the news of the invasion began pouring into the General Court in Boston. A letter from Brigadier General Charles Cushing, the commander of the militia of eastern-most county, Lincoln County, which encompassed the Penobscot River requested immediate support and supplies. ~~—~~There is a great difficulty in the way of the Militia of this County turning out not having provisions to support them, not one Family in Ten having Bread in their Houses nor anything else scarcely except from day to day. Neither is there a sufficiency of arms nor

¹⁰³Wheeler, 329. From the account of Colonel Josiah Brewer during the Penobscot Expedition.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 305. Proclamation by Brigadier-General Francis McLean, and Andrew Barclay, esq., commanding Detachments of His Majesty’s Land and Naval Forces in the River Penobscot, 15 June 1779.

¹⁰⁵Calef, 16.

ammunition.”¹⁰⁶ He further recommended that a joint naval and land attack could easily dislodge the British outpost. With little deliberation, on 24 June the General Court ordered the Board of War prepare all state and ~~private~~ armed vessels” that can be readied within six days to sail.¹⁰⁷ An incentive to private ship owners, the state promised ~~that~~ in case the said vessels or any of them shall be lost or damaged while on said Expedition, this State will make good such loss or Damage.” Furthermore ~~the~~ Officers and Seamen of such armed Vessels [are allowed] the same Pay, Rations and Privileges allowed to the Continental Navy.”¹⁰⁸ To encourage recruitment and to maintain secrecy, Massachusetts also imposed a twenty-day embargo on all non-fishing related, outward bound ships. Four days later, as the enormity of the task became more apparent, the General Court resolved to seek the services of Continental ships at Boston Harbor, and granted authority to impress any private ships required for the expedition.¹⁰⁹ To aid in this endeavor, Massachusetts later extended the embargo and additional twenty days further attempting to coerce non-participating ships.

In reality, assembling a fleet for the expedition would take the better part of a month. Ultimately, Massachusetts assembled nineteen armed ships for the expedition. Three Continental Navy vessels anchored in Boston when news arrived. Massachusetts gained approval from the Navy Board to use these three ships, the *Warren*, *Province*, and

¹⁰⁶Massachusetts. *Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, to which are Prefixed the Charters of the Province* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1922), 21:91.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 114.

Diligent. Designated the commander of the fleet was the senior Continental Naval Officer, Captain Dudley Saltonstall, commander of the *Warren*. All three ships were short crewmen and Massachusetts endeavored to fill the shortages. The new thirty-two gun frigate and the fleet's flagship, the *Warren* alone required one-hundred seamen. From the Massachusetts Navy came the *Tyrannicide*, *Hazard*, and *Active*. New Hampshire contracted the privateer the *Hampden* to contribute to the expedition. Massachusetts chartered the remaining twelve privateers giving the fleet a total of three-hundred and forty-four guns. Massachusetts contracted or impressed twenty-four transports to transport the supplies and soldiers to the Penobscot Bay.¹¹⁰ Assigned to the continental and state ships were approximately three-hundred marines who would prove their worth in the coming battle.

As the senior Continental Navy officer, command of the fleet defaulted to Captain Dudley Saltonstall. Known as snobbish and ill-tempered, Saltonstall gained his commission in the Navy due to the influence of his brother-in-law Silas Deane. A captain of a merchant ship prior to the war, he served on various ships during the war. While he proved able enough during single-ship combat, he had not commanded anything similar in size to this fleet. His instructions from the navy Board charged him to –Take every Measure & use your Utmost Endeavours [sic] to Captivate, Kill, or destroy the Enemies whole Force both by Sea & land & the more effectually to answer that purpose you are to Consult Measures & preserve the greatest harmony with the Commander of the Land

¹¹⁰Charles Richard Smith and Charles H. Waterhouse, *Marines in the Revolution: a History of the Continental Marines in the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), 206-207.

Forces that the Navy & Army may cooperate & assist each other.”¹¹¹ The majority of the other captains of the fleet were privateers who, although generally brave and experienced, focused on gaining a profit in captured ships and cargos. Successful privateers knew how to choose fights they were particularly certain to win and profit from.

The next day, 26 June, the General Court officially formed the ground force for the expedition. The Maine counties provided the bulk of the force. The two closest counties, Cumberland and Lincoln Counties were to provide six-hundred men each.¹¹² Three days later, York County received orders to add three-hundred troops to the overall force.¹¹³ Expecting a short campaign, the General Court established two month enlistments the men raised for the expedition. The final component of the army was a detachment of one hundred men from Lieutenant Colonel Paul Revere’s Castle Island artillery unit. Revere’s unit would employ the expedition’s cannon consisting of two eighteen-pounders, three nine-pounders, and four four-pounders and one howitzer.¹¹⁴ The General Court directed the purchase of an extensive list of supplies and provisions authorized for the expedition. Recruiting for the expedition would be another matter.

The General Court appointed Brigadier General Solomon Lovell to command of the expedition. He first saw action in 1756 at Crown Point during the French and Indian War. Lovell later saw service both during the revolution at the siege of Boston and in

¹¹¹Chester B. Kevitt, *General Solomon Lovell and the Penobscot Expedition 1779* (Weymouth, MA: Weymouth Historical Society, 1976), 72-73.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 104-105.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 104.

Rhode Island in 1778 where he commanded nearly 1,200 men from Massachusetts. As part of General John Sullivan's army, his force was part of a portion of the army commanded by General Nathaniel Greene. His unit served with distinction, receiving recognition from Sullivan ~~for~~ their intrepidity, which they showed in repeatedly repulsing the enemy, and finally driving them from the field of action."¹¹⁵ Furthermore, he was a respected member of the General Court, representing the town of Weymouth since 1771. By 1779, he developed a reputation as a popular, steady, and capable officer. By all measures, he appeared to be the perfect successor to the legendary William Pepperell who successfully took Louisbourg decades earlier.

Lovell's second in command was the thirty-one years old, Brigadier General Peleg Wadsworth. Wadsworth's military began as the captain of a company of minutemen and mustered in response to the Battle of Lexington and Concord. He served as an aide under General Artemas Ward in 1776 and was later present at the Battle of Long Island. He received an appointment as a brigadier in the militia in 1777 and promoted to the position as the state adjutant general the following year. Younger and full of energy, he complimented the older General Lovell. Finally, appointed as Lovell's chief of ordinance was Lieutenant Colonel Paul Revere. No doubt an ardent patriot, Revere had little military experience, the majority of that time spent in garrison duty on Castle Island. His appointment owed much to his political connections that earned him many enemies. Despite his undoubtedly patriotic spirit, Revere showed little energy and vigor during the campaign.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 156-158.

The task of recruiting the bulk of the army fell upon the commanders of the Maine regiments, General Charles Cushing of Lincoln County, General Samuel Thompson of Cumberland County, and General John Frost of York County. York County, with the smallest quota, managed to raise only one hundred and thirty men of the three hundred ordered by the General Court. Arriving at Falmouth to meet the transports, Major William Todd reported that of his force, ~~several~~ of which were brought by force of arms.” In Cumberland County, the Adjutant General Jeremiah Hill would report that ~~the~~ troops were collected with the greatest reluctance so I recommended martial law. Some were taken and brought by force, some were frightened and joined voluntarily, and some sulked and kept themselves concealed.”¹¹⁶ In all, Cumberland County would muster four hundred and thirty-three soldiers of a quota of six hundred under the command of Colonel Jonathan Mitchell. Lincoln County, which encompasses the Penobscot River, filled only half their quota. In total, eight hundred and seventy-two Maine soldiers mustered for duty.

After several delays caused by the many details of the expedition, the ships of the Penobscot Expedition departed Boston on 19 July, almost six weeks after McLean’s force landed. The fleet sailed to Townsend, Maine to load the assembled militia onto the transports. Arriving, at Townsend, General Lovell first learns the troops fall far short of their quotas, estimating the force consists of approximately a thousand men. Following a review the next day, General Wadsworth disappointingly commented that ~~At least one-~~

¹¹⁶Nathan Goold, *The History of Colonel Jonathn Mitchell’s Cumberland County Regiment: Bagaduce Expedition: 1779* (Portland, ME: Press of the Thurston, 1899), 4-5.

fourth part appeared to me to be small boys and old men, unfit for service.”¹¹⁷ Realizing that time was short, Lovell decided to continue with the forces available. After a delay caused by unfavorable winds, time which Lovell uses to drill the troops, the expedition departed on 24 July.

British Defenses

While Massachusetts remained occupied with the details necessary for the Penobscot Expedition, General McLean’s troops continued on fortifying the Bagaduce Peninsula. The original specifications called for a square fort, two hundred feet along the interior sides with bastions in the four corners. Surrounding the fort was a ten foot high earthen wall in turn surrounded by a protective moat. Clearing trees and hauling in the necessary supplies delayed construction of the fort until 2 July when engineers began marking it out.¹¹⁸ News of the expedition reached McLean on 18 July a day prior to its departure. Captain Mowat was the first to respond to the threat, ordering his ships —into the best situation to defend the harbour, annoy the Enemy and co-operate with the land forces.”¹¹⁹ Maximizing his three sloops-of-war, Mowat arrayed them across the narrowest point of the bay, anchoring his ships between the redoubts on Dyce’s Point and Nautilus

¹¹⁷Solomon Lovell and Gilbert Nash, *The Original Journal of General Solomon Lovell Kept during the Penobscot Expedition, 1779: with a Sketch of His Life by Gilbert Nash* (Boston: The Weymouth Historical Society, 1881), 58.

¹¹⁸Maine Historical Society. “Dispatch from General Francis McLean to General Henry Clinton about the Penobscot Expedition Forces,” 23 August 1779, <http://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/7475.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2011).

¹¹⁹Calef, 303.

Island. Through the use of spring lines, he ensured that all of his ships presented the broadside of his ships to any would-be attackers.

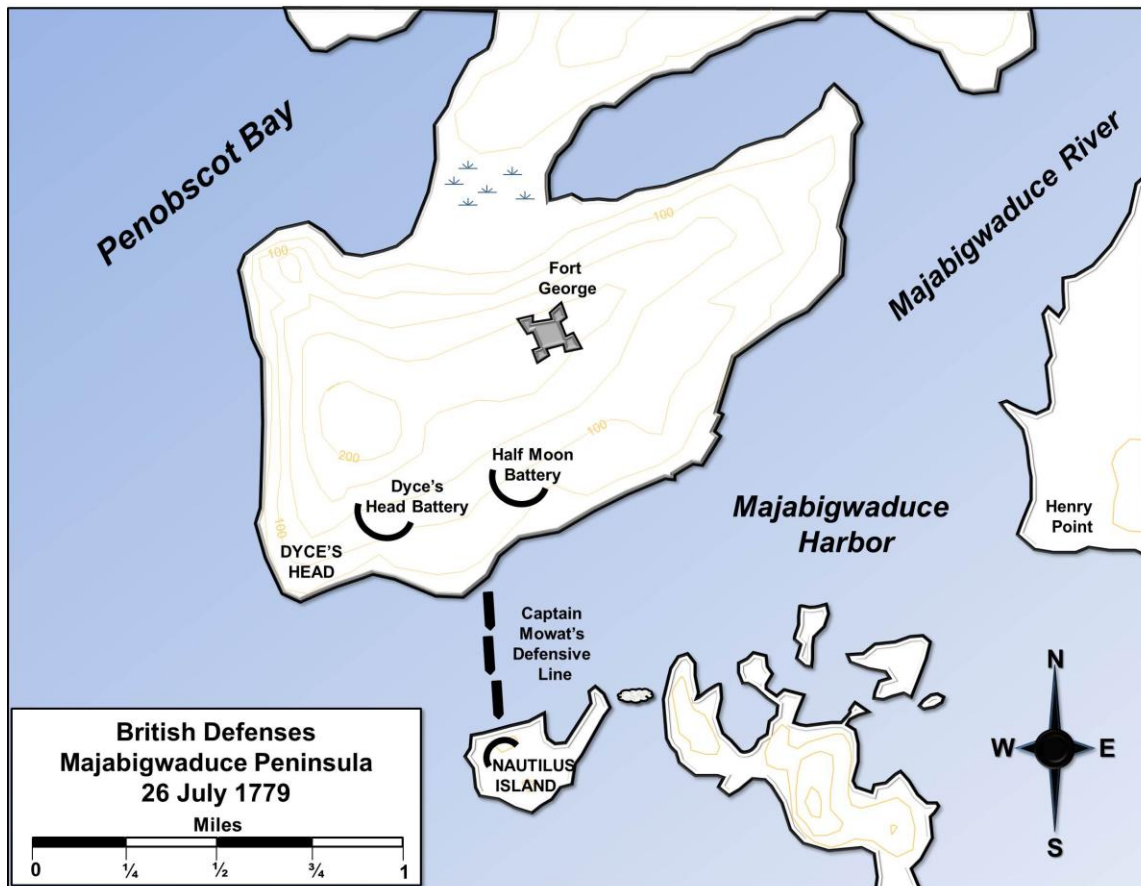


Figure 7. British Defenses, Majabigwaduce Peninsula, 26 July 1779
Source: Created by author.

By the 21st of July, news arrived from a spy with the size and scope of the expedition. Detailed information on the expedition including the names of ships and their captain convinced McLean of its validity.¹²⁰ McLean immediately transitioned from

¹²⁰James Phinney Baxter, *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Portland: Lefavor-Tower Co, 1913), 17:256.

building the fort to making what he had thus far defensible. In a letter to General Clinton, he gives his bleak assessment of the fort on 21 July:

Two of the Bastions were untouched, the other two with the Curtains were in general, from four to five feet and twelve thick, the ditch in many places not more than three in depth, And no Artillery mounted or Platforms laid; I had however some time before thrown up a Battery of four Twelve Pounders on a Height near the River for the protection of the Ships.¹²¹

Realizing the gravity of the situation, McLean increased the force's efforts and Captain Mowat sent one hundred and eighty sailors ashore to assist in the preparations.

Planning the Attack

While aboard the sloop *Sally*, General Lovell finalized his initial invasion plan. The plan looked to maximize the element of surprise, calling for an immediate large-scale landing of his forces upon arrival. The plan, which did not account for any British warships in the harbor, was to land his forces in four main waves. Major Daniel Littlefield's detachment of York County militia would land first as the advance party and to protect the flanks of the first line as they landed. The first line, commanded by Brigadier General Wadsworth consisted of the Colonel Mitchell's regiment of Cumberland County militia supported by one field piece. Once the first line disembarked, boats would return to pick up Colonel McCobb's Lincoln County militia regiment, also supported by one field piece. Finally, Lieutenant Colonel Revere's artillery train would follow as soon as the conditions permitted. Given the minimal intelligence available to him, Lovell does not elaborate the plan of attack any further or actions taken once the

¹²¹Maine Historical Society, "Dispatch from General Francis McLean to General Henry Clinton about the Penobscot Expedition Forces," 23 August 1779, <http://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/7475.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2011).

troops land. Expressing confidence in the abilities of his New England soldiers, the general assures that —should there be an Opportunity [sic] he will have the utmost exertions of every Officer and Soldier not only to maintain, but to add new Lustre to the Fame of the Massachusetts Militia.”¹²²

On 24 July, a half day’s sail from the Bagaduce peninsula, Lovell’s force still lacked intelligence on the British defenses. To rectify this deficiency, the commander of the *Tyrannicide* landed a small detachment of marines on the Fox Islands at the mouth of the Penobscot River. Pretending to British sailors, the marines sought to gain some information on the British outpost. Somewhat confused by the ruse, the islanders reported what they knew about Mowat’s ships and the incomplete state of McLean’s fortifications. The marines brought a few of the locals back to the ship for further questioning. Although British ships in the harbor were unexpected, the poor state of the fort was good news for Lovell. Earlier that day, Lovell received some unexpected allies against the British when forty-one Penobscot Indians approached the fleet in canoes. After a brief council with Lovell on board, they —determined to proceed with us.”¹²³ That night, orders went around to all of the ships to prepare for a general assault the next day.

The next day, the men aboard the transports prepared themselves for battle. The ships sailed up the Penobscot arriving at the mouth of the Majawaduce Harbor at about noon. Captain Saltonstall found that Mowat’s three sloops presented a formidable obstacle by arraying themselves broadside across the mouth of Bagaduce Harbor. After a

¹²²Kevitt, 75-76. The plan of attack is dated 24 June 1779, the day the expedition departed for Penobscot and the day before the expedition arrived.

¹²³Ibid, 31. The motivations of the Indians are unclear, but they remained and fought well for the Americans throughout the battle.

small council of war, Saltonstall formed up nine of his warships to attack Mowat's small fleet in three groups of three. The shortcomings of the hastily assembled fleet quickly became evident. Ordered to join the attack, Captain Titus Salter of New Hampshire's twenty-four gun *Hampdon*, responded, "Should be Glad Sir If [sic] you would give me men a Nuf [sic] to man my ship."¹²⁴ Meanwhile, Saltonstall had issues of his own. His inexperienced crew, over a hundred recently recruited for the expedition, showed their lack of gunnery skills. Calef, who witnessed naval gun battle from the shore wrote, "the fire of the enemy was random and irregular, and their manoeuvres [sic], as to backing and filling, bespoke confusion, particularly in the first division."¹²⁵ The two-hour duel ended inconclusively with only minor damage to the rigging of the British ships.

Late that afternoon, despite Saltonstall's limited success against the British ships, Lovell began loading his troops into the small whaleboats for a landing. The rocky, brush-covered cliffs of Dyce's Head were not an ideal for a landing, but did offer protection from the British ships. The thick woods would also offer cover for the landing troops. At about seven o'clock, the first wave of whaleboats began rowing toward shore. High winds picked up and created large swells, making progress slow and difficult. Watching the ships struggle toward shore, Lovell became concerned that his first wave would be overrun before his boats could return with the second. He decided to call off the assault just as the boats approached musket range. Struggling to turn the boats in the

¹²⁴Baxter, 17:212. From the disposition of Captain Titus Salter given to the Massachusetts General Court on 25 September 1779.

¹²⁵Calef, 18. The term "backing and filling" is a sailing term to describe a method used when the wind is running against a ship in a narrow channel.

swells, the landing force lost one Indian to enemy fire.¹²⁶ The first day of the siege ended with little gain for the Americans, who began to identify some of the issues with the hastily assembled force.

The next day began with another naval attack that lasted for approximately two and a half hours. The positioning of the British ships in the harbor made it difficult for the American ships to close the distance between them. As a result, their fires were too far away to be effective. American gunners focused largely on the British mooring points in an attempt to swing the ship away from their broadside positions. Consequently damage to the British ships was ~~—~~chiefly to the rigging at the extreme ends of the ships.”¹²⁷ Finding direct attack too difficult, Saltonstall planned to strike at the southern anchor point of the Royal Navy’s line, Nautilus Island. At approximately five o’clock that evening, a force of two-hundred continental and state marines under the command of Captain John Welch landed on the south side of Island. As a diversion, the militia’s first line loaded their boats and feinted a landing Dyce’s Head. Seeing the large invasion force of American marines supported by several warships, the twenty marine battery on Nautilus Island quickly fled the island, leaving behind four small cannon and suffering one killed. While the marines took the island without casualties, the feinting force lost one boat to a chance shot from a British battery, losing three men, including Major Daniel Littlefield, the commander of the York County contingent. The Americans quickly added three heavier guns from Lieutenant Colonel Revere’s artillery to the

¹²⁶Kevitt, 32. Transcribed from General Lovell’s journal.

¹²⁷Calef, 19.

captured guns on Nautilus Island.¹²⁸ As the Americans worked through the night to ready the guns, Captain Mowat quietly pulled back his ships out of the immediate range of the cannon and established a second defensive line.

The Americans spent the next day, 27 July, completing the battery on Nautilus Island and preparing for the main landings planned to occur at midnight. Unoptimistic that Saltonstall could dislodge the Royal Navy ships any time soon, he opted for a less than ideal landing at Dyce's Head. Frustrated by the lack of action, thirty-two of the captains and lieutenants of the American fleet (minus those of the other Continental Navy ships) presented Saltonstall with a petition that morning. The captains, mostly privateers, eager to finish the fight so they could move onto more profitable ventures, wrote,

That we your Petitioners strongly Impress'd with the importance of the Expedition, and earnestly desire to render our Country all the Service in our power – Wou'd Represent to your Honor, that the most speedy [sic] Exertions shou'd be used to Accomplish the design we came upon. We think Delays in the present Case are extremely dangerous: as our Enemies are daily Fortifying and Strengthening themselves, & are stimulated so to do being in daily Expectation of a Reinforcement.¹²⁹

The American commanders hoped that the seizure of the Nautilus battery would give the American fleet a foothold into the harbor. From there, the fleet could attack the three ships, and support the landing. Instead, in a council of the war that afternoon, the American leadership decided on the opposite strategy. Land forces would first seize the peninsula and employ ground based batteries against Mowat's ships. Dyce's Head on the west side of the peninsula remained the only viable option. To augment the landing

¹²⁸Kevitt, 33.

¹²⁹Ibid., 78. Transcribed from the Petition from the Ship Masters to Commodore Saltonstall.

forces, Saltonstall's ships contributed two hundred and twenty seven marines. Lieutenant Colonel Revere committed eighty men from his artillery train as well to support Lovell's eight hundred and fifty men from the militia.¹³⁰ With the addition of the marines to his landing force and the death of York County's commander, Lovell altered the first wave. Marines joined the first wave of attackers along with four hundred of the militia from the other counties. For the landing, the fleet pressed every available boat into service. A small flotilla of specially made flat-bottom boats, whaleboats, rowboats, and even one particularly flat-bottomed sloop loaded men for the assault.¹³¹

While the Americans prepared for the assault, the McLean's men hastily strengthened their defenses. At the request of McLean, Mowat contributed some of his ships' offside guns to help strengthen the incomplete ground defenses.¹³² The British placed pickets along the western heights of the peninsula on Dyce's Point and along the swampy neck to the north to protect against a mainland attack. Manning the pickets on Dyce's Head stood Captain Archibald Campbell and his company of Hamiltons. An additional force of seventy men stood in a nearby fleche ready to support the picket line in the event of an attack.¹³³

¹³⁰Ibid., 79. From the minutes of the 27 July Council of War aboard the *Warren*.

¹³¹Baxter, 17:265. From the deposition of Adjutant General Jeremiah Hill.

¹³²Calef, 34-35.

¹³³Maine Historical Society, "Dispatch from General Francis McLean to General Henry Clinton about the Penobscot Expedition Forces," 23 August 1779, <http://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/7475.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2011). A fleche is an arrow-shaped fieldwork with an open back end.

The American Landing – 28 July 1779

At midnight, the landing force was still loading from ships to the boats waiting to take them to shore. Unable to sleep the night prior, many of the men conducting the assault were exhausted. These were the same militia and marines that conducted the attack of Nautilus Island and supporting feint the day before.¹³⁴ Finally at approximately four o'clock early the next morning, supporting ships began to shell suspected British positions on Dyce's Head. Meanwhile, the sailors began rowing the flotilla of boats toward the shore. After about a half-hour of shelling, the American boats arrived along the rocky coast of the peninsula. General Peleg Wadsworth led the first wave of attackers. Years later, he recalled the opening stage of the day's battle.

The fire of the Enemy opened upon us from the top of the Bank or Clift, just as the boats reached the Shore. We step'd out & the Boats immediately sent back. There was now a stream of fire over our heads from the Fleet, & a shower of Musketry in our faces from the Top of the Clift. We soon found the Clift unsurmountable even without Opponents. The party therefore, was divided into three parts, one sent to the right, another to the left till they should find the Clift practicable, & the Center keeping up their fire to amuse the Enemy.¹³⁵

Sent to the right was a contingent of mostly marines by Captain Welch mixed with a few of the militia. To the left was a detachment of militia, mostly from Colonel Mitchell's Cumberland County Regiment. In the center was a mixture of troops who attempted to draw the fire of the British and allow their comrades to the heights.

¹³⁴Charles Bracelen Flood, *Rise, and Fight Again: Perilous times along the Road to Independence* (New York: Dodd & Mead, 1976), 264-265.

¹³⁵Maine Historical Society, *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society*, vol 2, part 4 (Portland, ME: Maine Historical Society, 1891), 158.



Figure 8. Dyce's Head, circa 1920

Source: Henry E. Dunnack, *The Maine Book* (Augusta, ME: [s.n.], 1920), 5.

Note: This photo shows the site of the American landings. Trask's Rock, the large rock in the center is named after a marine fifer, Israel Trask. Part of the American center he sought cover behind the rock during the initial landing.

For the defending British soldiers of the Hamilton Regiment, it was their first taste of combat. Inexplicably, the inexperienced company commander ordered his soldiers to hold their fire until the Americans landed, much to the benefit of the Americans. Shaken by the American bombardment the British lines began to give way when the men saw a vastly superior number of enemy troops unloading the boats. Only one British officer, Lieutenant John Moore, continued to hold the line. Moore's detachment of twenty men anchored the picket's left flank. He soon found himself directly in the path of two hundred American marines and militia as they scrambled up the rocky heights. Working along the shoreline, the marines soon found a steep trail leading off the right. Slowly they began climbing the heights, often using their hands to pull themselves up. Moore's Hamiltons poured musket fire into the hapless marines struggling up the heights, eventually killing nine, including their commander, Captain

Welch. However, when the marines crested the first tier of the heights, it was Moore who came under heavy fire. Moore later wrote, “I confess that at the first fire they gave us, which was within thirty yards, I was a good deal startled, but I think this went gradually off afterwards.”¹³⁶ As he fought off the marine attack, Moore found himself between the American militia to his right and the marines circling to the left. Even though seven of his men were dead and several more lay wounded, he continued to fight. Meanwhile, Moore’s commander who fled with the bulk of his troops reported to General McLean. Hearing sounds of continued fighting, a skeptical McLean sent a fresh company back to the picket line to attempt to salvage the situation. Recognizing the precarious position Moore’s men were in, the relief commander directed him to withdraw or face complete envelopment by the Americans.¹³⁷

After Moore’s detachment retired back to Fort George, the marines found themselves in command of the high ground of Dyce’s Head. Only twenty minutes had passed since they first hit the shore. After pausing briefly to regroup the men, they moved out on a broad front over the high ground and into the thick woods on the other side. Cresting Dyce’s Head, the marines noticed a small artillery battery at the bottom of the point along the shoreline, currently dueling with American ships and the battery on Nautilus Island. Charging down the hill, they quickly routed the British artillerymen who quickly retreated to the safety of Mowat’s ships anchored in the harbor. Calef wrote that

¹³⁶James Carrick Moore, *The Life of Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore* (London: John Murray, 1834), 1:23-24.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

—an attempt was made to demolish the guns, but the enemy would not suffer it.”¹³⁸ The Americans captured the entire battery’s compliment of three guns intact. Soon afterwards, the Americans had secured the entire western portion of the Bagaduce Peninsula. Even the picket stationed along the neck of the peninsula withdrew for fear that the Americans would cut them off.¹³⁹



Figure 9. Assault at Penobscot 28 July 1779

Source: Charles H. Waterhouse, *A Pictorial History: The Marines in the Revolution* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 1975), 25.

As the Americans continued to sweep across the central plateau, McLean grimly organized his defenses. He knew his half-finished defenses would not be sufficient to halt

¹³⁸Calef, 36.

¹³⁹Maine Historical Society, “Dispatch from General Francis McLean to General Henry Clinton about the Penobscot Expedition Forces,” 23 August 1779, <http://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/7475.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2011)

a determined American attack. He appointed Lieutenant Moore the commander of a fifty-man reserve force with orders that —should the enemy rush forward, as soon as they got into the ditch of the fort, he should sally out and attack them on the flank with charged bayonets.”¹⁴⁰ In reality, he thought the battle had already been lost. After the battle, McLean would remark, “I was in no situation to defend myself, I only meant to give them one or two guns, so as not to be called a coward, and then have struck my colors, which I stood by for some time to do, as I did not wish to throw away the lives of my men for nothing.”¹⁴¹ The Americans, however, were far less aggressive in their attack than McLean gave them credit for. As the men reached the edge of the cleared space around the fort, they stopped. With no orders or leaders encouraging them to go farther, they instead settled in for a siege of the fort. General Lovell seemed pleased with the progress, reporting back to the Massachusetts General Court that “we are within 100 Rod [550 yards] of the Enemy’s main fort on a Commanding piece of Ground, & hope soon to have the Satisfaction of informing you of the Capturing of the whole Army.”¹⁴² American casualties were much lighter than expected, with sixteen killed and twenty-one wounded. Perhaps surprised by their success, the Americans failed to press home the attack. Instead, they returned the initiative back to the British and called forward the entrenching equipment and Revere’s cannon.

¹⁴⁰Moore, 24.

¹⁴¹Wheeler, 332. This is quoted of McLean in Colonel John Brewer’s account of the Penobscot Expedition.

¹⁴²Kevitt, 81. Quoted from a Letter from General Lovell to Jeremiah Powell, dated 28 July 1779 at Majorbaggaduce.

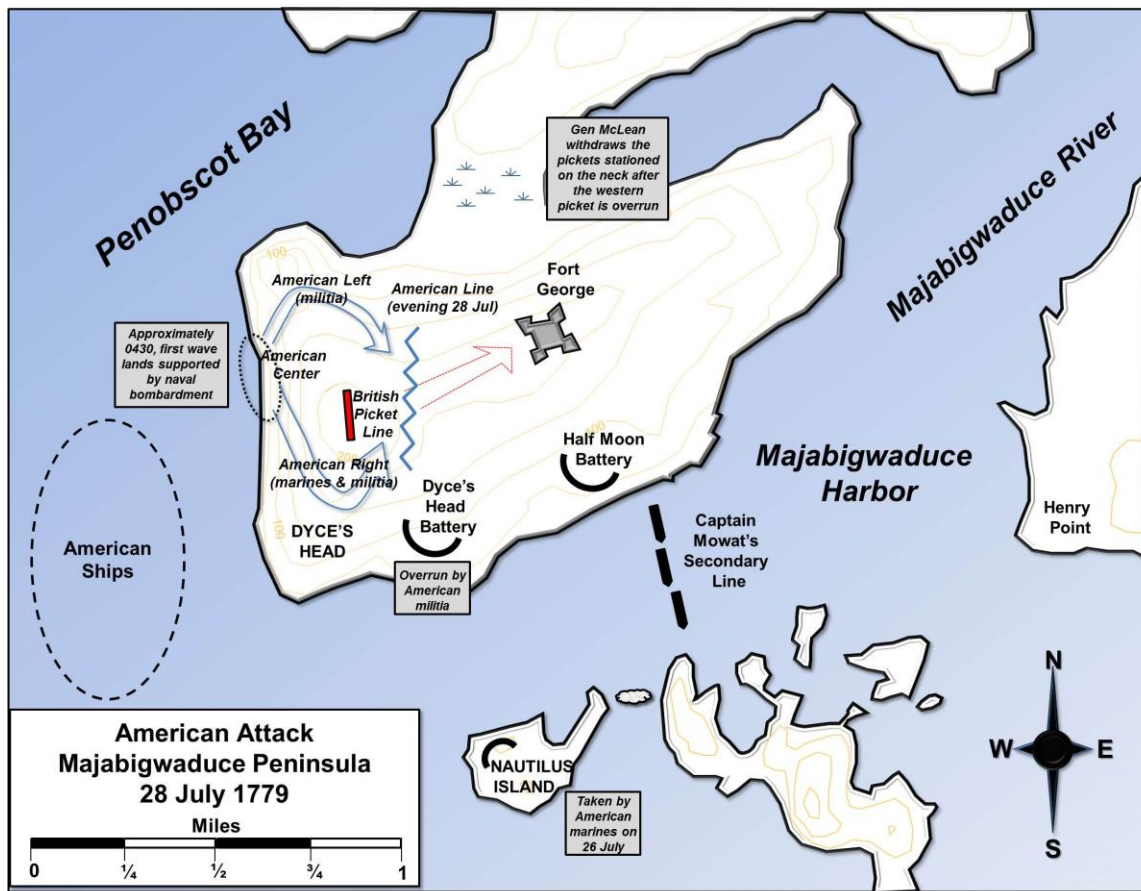


Figure 10. The American Landings and Attack, 28 July 1779
Source: Created by author.

At about ten o'clock, Captain Saltonstall decided it was time to engage the Royal Navy ships in the harbor. Using his ship, the *Warren* and three other ships, he engaged the British ships from long distance from the mouth of the harbor. Supported by the Nautilus Island Battery, Saltonstall kept up —a brisk fire” for a half an hour. However, the British gunners got the best of his ship, crippling it and forcing Saltonstall to retire after a brief thirty minute exchange. The *Warren's* main-mast was shot through in two places in addition to other significant damage. Saltonstall's inexperienced crew nearly ran the fleet's flagship aground before they managed to anchor the ship safely. Extensive repairs

rendered the ship incapable for the next two days.¹⁴³ The Royal Navy ships under Captain Mowat accounted for themselves well, but the foothold on the peninsula combined with the continued fire from Nautilus Island forced the ships to again move further back into the bay.

The Siege

Apparently unaware of how close he was to victory, General Lovell was happy with the day's attack, noting in his journal that —such a landing has not been made since Wolfe.”¹⁴⁴ The American landing achieved surprise and threw the British garrison off balance. He also isolated McLean's force from the mainland by seizing the peninsula's neck and the entire western half of the peninsula was now in American hands. Although the Royal Navy kept the American fleet at bay, the Americans contained them within the Bagaduce Harbor. Cut off, the only hope for the British was to hold until relief arrived. Success for the Americans meant using their superiority of numbers, before it was too late. Instead, the Americans settled into a siege that they could hardly afford.

With great industry, the Americans began work on fortifications from which they could lay siege to the British fort. American militia soon found themselves busy cutting roads, clearing fields of fire, and digging entrenchments. Seamen ferried cannon from the ships to shore and work details manhandled the cannon up the hill and into positions established by Revere's men. In two days, by 30 July, the Americans had two eighteen pound and one twelve pound cannon along with a five inch mortar in action against the

¹⁴³Calef, 20-21

¹⁴⁴Kevitt, 35.

British.¹⁴⁵ The Americans built series of zigzag trenches to protect their lines and to inch the guns closer to the fort. The recently captured battery on Dyce's Head joined in with the one on Nautilus Island in an almost continual bombardment of the British ships in the harbor.

Successfully landing their force, the Americans needed to figure what to do next. From Lovell's perspective, he needed the support of Saltonstall's fleet to storm Fort George. For Saltonstall, his attacks on the British ships had proved inconclusive. Concerned by the confining geography and difficult currents of the bay, he was reluctant to commit his ships in an all-out attack on Mowat's three ships. For Saltonstall, it was clear that Lovell's men had to silence the land-based gun batteries before he could safely attack the British ships. A council of war aboard the *Warren* comprised of the fleet's captains on the 29th echoed this sentiment. The reduction of the lower battery known the "half-moon" battery became a precondition to naval attack. Meanwhile, Lovell and his commanders had other distracters. With the militia off the boats, discipline issues began to ripple across the American camp. On 30 July, General Lovell issued orders designed to curb what he termed as alarming behavior amongst the men. The first, designed to curb an increasing desertion rate, prohibited non-commissioned officers and soldiers to "presume to be more than twenty Rods [110 yards] absent from his Lines." His second order sought to enforce greater discipline, directed that the men were "strictly forbid to fire their Guns in such a loose unsoldierlike [sic] manner as have been practised [sic] of late."¹⁴⁶ To add to the expedition's woes, news arrived of impending British

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 83.

reinforcements. The *Diligent*, dispatched to patrol the coast, had captured a British schooner carrying messages for General McLean. Although the dispatches were destroyed, several prisoners from the ship provided credible evidence that a British fleet was assembling to sail to McLean's relief.¹⁴⁷

Finally, after several days of inactivity, Lovell formed a plan of action. With returns showing that he had 873 men militia available for action, he worried that his force was too small to take fort. He looked locally for new reinforcements to grow his army. To do so, Lovell issued a proclamation similar to McLean's a month earlier. In his proclamation, he gave local residents forty-eight hours to join his camp with ~~such~~ arms and accoutrements as they now possess."¹⁴⁸ While evidence suggests he did entice some men to join his ranks, they served only to offset his losses due to desertion, illness, and combat related casualties. For the second part of his strategy, he planned an attack on the half-moon battery, hoping that in taking it, he could finally get the support of Saltonstall's fleet. His plan called for a nighttime attack with a force of three hundred soldiers, marines, sailors, and Indians under the command of Brigadier General Wadsworth.

In the early evening hours, Wadsworth led his force to a hiding site near the battery. There, he waited until approximately two in the morning, when he suspected the redoubt's defenders were least alert, and rushed its fortifications. Although the fifty

¹⁴⁷Baxter, 17:288. From the testimony of Captain Phillip Brown, of the *Diligent*.

¹⁴⁸Calef, 39. Proclamation by Solomon Lovell, Esq., Brigadier-General and Commander in Chief of the Forces of the State of Massachusetts Bay, and employed on an Expedition against the Army of the King of Great Britain at Penobscot, dated 29 July 1779.

British marines put up a good fight, the American quickly overwhelmed them. Half of the defenders managed to reach the safety of the main fort. Of the other half, five lay dead and fifteen were either wounded or surrendered. American losses were five killed and another twelve wounded. As the Americans consolidated their gains, the Indians that joined the party reportedly stripped and scalped the British dead.¹⁴⁹ Understanding its importance, General McLean prepared a counter-attack. At about five o'clock, fifty men from —the Hamiltons,” charged the battery with bayonets fixed. Unprepared for a determined counterattack, the charge drove the entire three-hundred man American force from the battery. Barely managing to destroy some supplies and pausing long enough to knock the cannon from the mounts, the Americans retreated back to their fortifications.¹⁵⁰ Wadsworth's rout, combined with a heavy rain that began at dawn, dealt a significant blow to morale. Lovell needed to find another way to get Saltonstall's fleet into the fight. For the first time, Lovell admitted to the General Court that —the Enemy cannot be attacked by Storm with any probability of success-their works being exceedingly strong and our Troops (tho brave) are yet undisciplined.”¹⁵¹ The next day he requested —a few [hundred] regular disciplined troops and Five Hundred hand Grenades” from the Massachusetts General Court to allow him to take the fort by force.¹⁵²

Despite the growing realization that he might not succeed, Lovell refused to make any contingency plans in the event British relief arrived. General Wadsworth, who was

¹⁴⁹Wheeler, 316. As chronicled in Sergeant William Lawrence's journal.

¹⁵⁰Flood, 195.

¹⁵¹Kevitt, 87.

¹⁵²Ibid.

earning a solid reputation amongst the men by leading the last two major assaults, entreated Lovell to make plans in the event the expedition failed.

It was urged upon Genl Lovell to erect some Place of resort up the River at the Narrow, in Case of Retreat so that the Troops might have a place of resort in case of necessity & also to have some place of Opposition to the Enemy should He push us thus far-but the Genl would hear nothing of the kind: alledging [sic] that it would dishearten our Army & shew [sic] them that we did not expect to succeed.¹⁵³

While morale amongst the men was certainly an issue, in hindsight, the lack of planning proved to be disastrous.

Unable to leverage the naval fleet to provide a decisive edge against the fort, General Lovell next chose a strategy of slow attrition, slowly nibbling at the perimeter of the British forces. Men dragged guns across the peninsula's neck and constructed a battery of three guns at the Wescott house across the muddy flats that separated the mainland from the peninsula. Built directly to the north of Mowat's ships, the battery enabled the Americans to put effective fires on the British ships. The new Wescott Battery, but in action on 4 August, complemented the existing battery on Nautilus Island firing from the west. Seeking to put the British ships in an even less tenatable position, General Wadsworth led a detachment across the Bagaduce River to establish another battery at Hainey's Point. From this vantage point, the Americans could place the British in a three-way cross-fire. Exposed to the British ships, work on the redoubt proceeded slowly. On 9 August, the HMS *Nautilus* discovered one of the American boats ferrying supplies across the river to the new battery. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Mowat

¹⁵³Maine Historical Society, *Collections and Proceedings*, Volume 2, Part 4, 155.

dispatched a force of fifty sailors and soldiers to attack. Too isolated from other American support, Wadsworth abandoned the construction of the battery.¹⁵⁴

Although he achieved limited success at eroding the British perimeter, Lovell was running out of time. In addition to the threat of British reinforcements, attrition through constant shelling, illness, and desertion was taking a toll on his army. On 6 August, the expedition convened its first court martial, sentencing the first two deserters to ~~hide~~ a wooden horse 20 Minutes a Musquet [sic] to each foot.”¹⁵⁵ Unit returns showed that the numbers of men declined from 847 men fit for duty on 31 July down to 762 on 4 August. The last surviving return from the expedition on 7 August showed only 715 effectives available for duty.¹⁵⁶ Frustrated by the lack of progress, he wrote Commodore Saltonstall on 5 August, ~~I~~ have proceeded as far as I can on the present plan and find it inafectual [sic] for the purpose of dislodging or destroying the shiping I must therefore request an ansure [sic] from you whether you will venter [sic] your shipping up the river in order to demolish them or not that I may conduct my selfe accordingly.”¹⁵⁷ His answer came the next day during a council of war aboard the *Warren*. The ship captains agreed that an assault of the fort was a necessary precondition to any action against the British ships.

¹⁵⁴Calef, 27.

¹⁵⁵Kevitt, 92.

¹⁵⁶Goold, 15.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 89.

Relief is on the Way

On the 7th of August, Lovell met with both his own officers and those of the naval contingent. The council unanimously decided that the enemy fort could not be taken by ~~–storm.~~” Still trying to salvage something from the expedition, Lovell proposed a plan to take the eastern part of the peninsula. In doing so, he could isolate the British fort and from the supporting ships. Since the sixth, seamen from Mowat’s ships went ashore to construct a small redoubt on the east side of the peninsula. Designed primarily to protect the rear of Fort George, the redoubt also provided a refuge for the sailors and marines if their ships were lost. Approximately three hundred sailors and marines alternatively pulled ship and shore duty based on the perceived American threat. By isolating the land and navy components, Lovell hoped Saltonstall could destroy Mowat’s fleet. Cut off from external support, Lovell hoped the fort’s defenders would have to surrender. The plan did not convince all of his officers. For the first time, members of the council, most notably Lieutenant Colonel Revere talked openly of abandoning the siege. When the council came to an inconclusive end, the expedition was no closer to determining a plan of action.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 93-94.

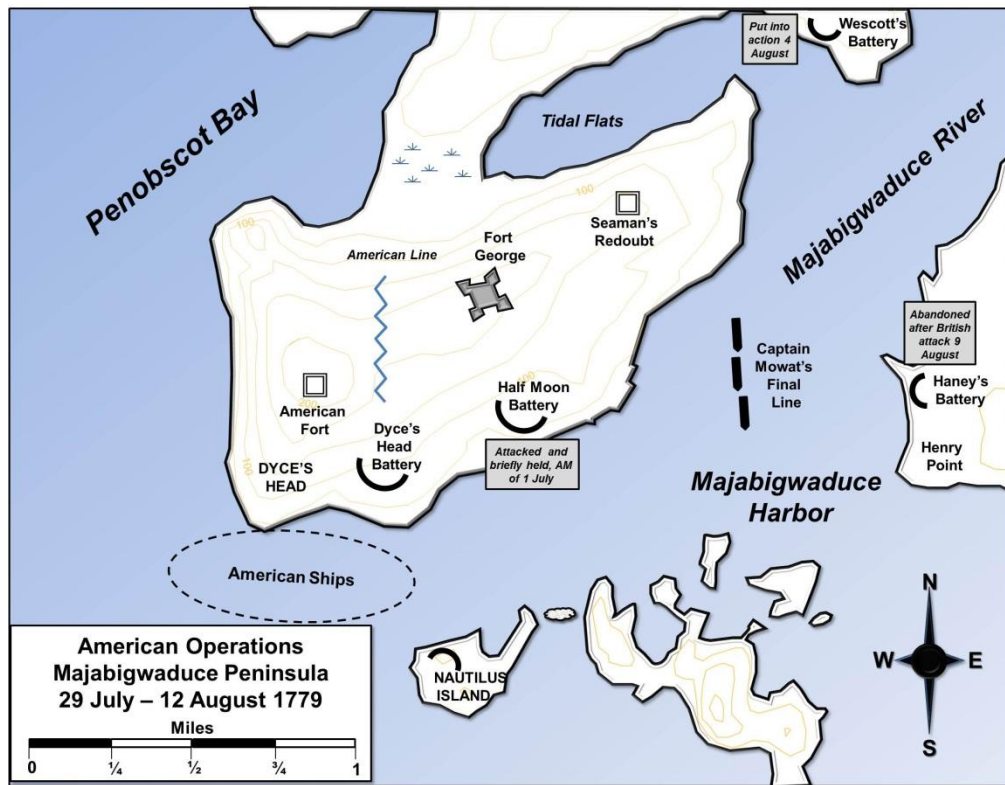


Figure 11. American Operations 29 July-12 August 1779
Source: Created by author.

After the council, hoping to demonstrate progress, Lovell ordered his men to conduct a feint to the south, hoping to draw out and then ambush British defenders from the fort. Hiding in the woods nearby, lay the one hundred militia soldiers of Lovell's ambush force. Initially, it appeared the ruse would work. Lovell noted, ~~the~~ bait took, they soon sallied [sic] with 80 Men & rush'd down to cut off our parties."¹⁵⁹ Instead, a determined attack from the British soldiers routed both the baiting and the ambush forces. The Americans ran back into friendly lines without causing any significant harm to the

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 44.

British soldiers. It was not the demonstration of American arms that Lovell had hoped for and served to sap the American's morale.

The next day, however, Lovell received an unexpected ally in Saltonstall's fleet. Captain Hoysteed Hacker of the Continental Sloop *Province* finally broke ranks with his superior. While he could not control the opinions of the privateer captains, Saltonstall had always counted on the unquestioned support of his subordinate captains from the navy. Unable to stand the inaction any longer, Hacker spoke out. In a letter to both Saltonstall and Lovell, he presented a plan that complimented Lovell's proposal for a coordinated land and sea attack. He suggested that Lovell's men augmented with one hundred marines attack the rear of the peninsula as three of the American ships attacked the British ships. These three ships would be covered by five other warships conducting a diversionary attack upon the main fort.¹⁶⁰ Hacker's letter provided the spark needed to convince Saltonstall to commit to an attack. Two days later, a council of war unanimously approved the plan. Now it was up to Lovell to prepare his troops to do their part.

Lovell ordered his regimental commanders to call for a six-hundred man volunteer force from their units. While he gave each of the regiment a quota, only one managed meet its quota of 200 men. The York regiment could not meet its quota because it had sent too many men chasing after twenty of its deserters.¹⁶¹ The other regiment faced similar issues. Hoping to increase the confidence of the men, he again tried a

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 95-96. From "Letter-Captain Hoysteed Hacker to General Lovell and Commodore Saltonstall," dated 8 August 1779.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 17-18.

demonstration designed to draw the defenders from the fort. Two hundred men marched out the now abandoned half-moon battery. His soldiers made a show of refortifying the battery, even sending out work details in hopes of drawing out some of the defenders. Unbeknownst to Lovell, one hundred of the British did come out, but hid in the nearby cornfields, preparing for a nighttime attack. At dusk, Lovell convinced he was unsuccessful in his endeavor, recalled his men. As the Americans returned to their defenses, the British attacked, routing them with minimal casualties on either side.¹⁶²

As Lovell struggled to find a successful strategy on the Bagaduce Peninsula, the General Court was busy trying to find him reinforcements. General Washington, at his headquarters at West Point, received intelligence that a British relief force sailed for the Penobscot. Concerned, he relayed to Massachusetts on 3 August.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, Major General Horatio Gates dispatched a regiment of four-hundred seasoned men under the command of Colonel Henry Jackson to the Penobscot. Although promising, these troops needed to move from their current location in Rhode Island to the Penobscot. The Massachusetts Court warned Lovell not to delay in hopes that Jackson's men would reach him before the British received their reinforcements, warning that ~~your~~ your situation is very critical. Something must be hazarded and Speedily too."¹⁶⁴ The Navy Board was more direct in their instructions to Saltonstall. In a dispatch on 12 August, the board directed him ~~that~~ as soon as you receive this you must take the Most Effectual Measures for the

¹⁶²Kevitt, 46-47. From Lovell's journal entry dated 11 August.

¹⁶³Ibid., 88. From ~~Letter~~ General Washington to the Massachusetts Council," dated 3 August 1779.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 99. From ~~Massachusetts Council to General Lovell,~~ dated 11 August 1779.

Capture or destruction of the Enemies Ships & with the greatest dispatch the nature & Situation of things will Admit of.”¹⁶⁵ It became apparent to all parties that time was running short on the Penobscot Expedition.

Lovell’s Final Attack and the Destruction of the American Fleet

On the 13 August, the sixteenth day after the initial landing, the Americans prepared for their coordinated attack. Lovell would attack first, sweeping around to the east side of the peninsula and cutting off Mowat’s ships from supporting the fort. Once he was in position, Saltonstall’s ships would attack. That morning, Lovell held a final council of war with his field officers. Even on the day of attack, the council remained divided. When the meeting concluded, the officers brought the issue to a vote. Nine voted to evacuate completely, while thirteen voted to “tarry” on the peninsula. Just after noon, Lovell personally led the attack recognizing that the attack may decide the entire campaign. Lovell’s two-hundred man force ran a gauntlet of cannon fire from the fort, but emerged on the other side of the peninsula without opposition.¹⁶⁶ The Americans now held all but the center of the peninsula and its harbor. With his portion of the attack completed, an ecstatic Lovell sent a messenger to Saltonstall to begin his attack. It was almost five o’clock when Saltonstall began his final and hopefully decisive attack. Just as the ships made way, the American and British combatants spotted strange sails coming up the bay from the south. The American fleet halted its attack, trying to determine if the

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 104

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 139. From the Deposition of Colonel Samuel McCobb, dated 28 September 1779.

ships were American or British reinforcements. Soon became painfully clear that the long awaited British relief force arrived.

At sunset, as dejected General Lovell returned back to the American lines. At midnight, Lovell ordered his commanders to prepare their troops and equipment to depart. By three o'clock the next morning, Colonel McCobb's men began loading their equipment onto boats. Two hours later, the men loaded the boats taking them to the transports. Once loaded, the transports sailed up the Penobscot Bay and away from the newly arrived British fleet.¹⁶⁷ At about four that morning, McLean noticed the American positions were unusually quiet and ordered a reconnaissance of their positions and found them thoroughly abandoned. Americans even evacuated all of the cannon with the exception of the guns on Nautilus Island, which they spiked and left in place.¹⁶⁸

With the withdrawal from the peninsula complete and all men and equipment safely aboard, the transports slowly made their way up the bay towards the mouth of the Penobscot River. There, although blocked from the open sea, the men could unload and establish an effective defense from the British attackers. Saltonstall's warships arrayed in an arc appearing to establish a defensive line designed to protect the transports as they sailed up the bay. The morning was calm with little wind, so all the ships sat becalmed for several hours. Eventually, the British fleet under the command of Sir George Collier began slowly inching his way towards the seventeen American ships with his six larger warships. The Americans waited, presenting their broadsides to the British who sailed in

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Maine Historical Society. "Dispatch from General Francis McLean to General Henry Clinton about the Penobscot Expedition Forces," 23 August 1779, <http://www.mainememory.net/media/pdf/7475.pdf> (accessed 14 April 2011).

two echelons of three. Although he outnumbered the British ships, Saltonstall chose not hold the line. As the British fired their first salvos at the American fleet, Saltonstall, aboard the *Warren* ordered the dispersal of the fleet. It would be his last order to the fleet. From this point, every ship fended for themselves. The fastest of the American ships, the *Hunter*, attempted to escape past the British ships and into the ocean. The British flagship, the *Raisnable*, intercepted and captured her. The remainder of the ships sailed up the bay, many passing up the slower transports. Only one ship, New Hampshire's *Hampden* put up a fight. Inexplicably sailing poorly, the British warships quickly caught her. The *Hampden* fired upon the British ships for thirty minutes doing little damage until crippled by point blank-fire from a British warship. With several men wounded, the captain finally surrendered.¹⁶⁹

Further up the bay, the remains of the American fleet were in full retreat towards the comparative safety of the Penobscot River. A light breeze coupled with an outgoing tide made progress difficult, if not impossible for the slower transports. Unable to continue progress up the bay and in some cases moving backwards on an outgoing tide, captains began beaching their ships, setting them on fire before running into the woods.

¹⁶⁹Buker, 223.



Figure 12. Destruction of the American fleet at Penobscot Bay, 14 August 1779
Source: Dominic Serres the Elder, unknown date.

General Wadsworth attempted to salvage the situation and establish a defensive position at the mouth of the Penobscot River. He moved up and down the bay, gathering men and sending them north to the the Penobscot River. He attempted to salvage key equipment and secure cannon from Revere's ship to build his defense. Despite his best efforts, the Penobscot Expedition simply just fell apart. A sense of panic engulfed the already poor morale of the force. By the morning of the sixteenth, crews set the last of the ships on fire and headed east into the woods. Nineteen year-old Thomas Philbrook, one of the marines of the expedition, summed up the final days of the expedition.

Our retreat was as badly managed as the whole expedition had been. Here we were, landed in a wilderness, under no command; those belonging to the ships, unacquainted with the woods, and only knew that a west course would carry us across to Kennebec; whereas, there were hundreds of militia that were old hunters, and knew the country. Some of these ought to have been detained as

pilots, and we might have got through in three days; but we had no one to direct; so everyone shifted for himself.¹⁷⁰

Aftermath

The American losses were heavy in terms of equipment but hard to measure in terms of personnel. The British fleet ensured the capture or destruction all seventeen warships and twenty transports present when it arrived.¹⁷¹ For Massachusetts, who underwrote the losses of the private ships, financial liabilities exceeded 1,041,760 pounds. After petitioning the Continental Congress for several years, it finally agreed to reimburse the wartime losses. By 1781, however, Massachusetts' credit became so poorly rated it had to pay cash when purchasing items.¹⁷² American casualty numbers vary widely due to the disorganized retreat and the increasing desertion rates during the later stage of the expedition. Based on primary sources, actual battle losses numbered about one hundred men. Some historians estimated that the destruction of the fleet and the subsequent retreat resulted in another three hundred American casualties, many of which lost their way in the wilderness and died of starvation. Colonel Jackson's regiment arrived in Falmouth as the details of the breakup of the Penobscot Expedition began arriving. For Jackson's men, their mission became a much different task of defending the Maine settlements from further British expansion. By October, it was apparent that an attack was no longer imminent and they departed, handing the security mission to General Wadsworth and the Massachusetts militia.

¹⁷⁰Smith, 379.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 207.

¹⁷²Leamon, 118.

The disastrous end of Penobscot Expedition sparked the General Court to convene a committee to investigate the causes of failure. The committee questioned or received testimony from most of the key participants except for Captain Saltonstall, who as a Continental Navy officer remained outside of the board's jurisdiction. During the War of 1812, British forces destroyed the naval archives that held the proceedings of Saltonstall's court martial, and no other copies of his version of events survives. The Massachusetts committee released its findings less than two months later on 7 October 1779. Three of the findings, including the principal cause of failure, placed the blame directly on Saltonstall. His ~~want~~ "want of proper spirit and energy" was the primary cause of failure, further aggravated by his discouraging any offensive operations by the American fleet and for ~~not~~ exerting himself at the time of the retreat, in opposing the enemy's foremost ships."¹⁷³ There are certainly elements of truth to the findings. Notwithstanding the tactical problems he faced with the Bagaduce Harbor, his failure to plan for and organize a defense against the British relief fleet is inexcusable. For Massachusetts, blaming Saltonstall for the failure strengthened their claim for reimbursement from the Continental Congress since it was their officer that led the expedition to defeat.

The committee found General Lovell acted with ~~proper~~ "proper courage and spirit" and with the support of the Commodore and the appropriate number of men ordered for service would have been successful. The board commended General Wadsworth, perhaps the competent of the senior leadership his ~~great~~ "great activity, courage, coolness and

¹⁷³Calef, 67.

prudence.”¹⁷⁴ The committee only vaguely admonished the leaders of the Maine militia for failing to raise the full complement of militia ordered by the General Court, assuming that many troops were available to muster.

Root Causes of Failure

In terms of pure numbers, Lovell’s army matched fairly evenly with McLeans in both numbers of men and in artillery. From the sea, the Americans had overwhelming naval superiority. Yet the leaders of the expedition failed to agree on a method to leverage their advantages against the British. The element of surprise, compounded by the psychological effect of the large American fleet, was almost enough to win the day on 28 July 1779. Poor leadership and cooperation continued to keep victory out of reach. While much of the blame for the disaster falls on its leaders, there are deeper causes that lay within the colony’s provincial army system.

While the Penobscot Expedition shared many characteristics with Massachusetts provincial armies, a total call-up of the militia created its own challenges. Members of the expedition more closely resembled the general militia at large and not the normal recruiting pool for provincial armies. While the average age of men in provincial armies ranged from the teens to mid thirties, the militia had men aged sixteen to sixty-four.¹⁷⁵ Thus it is likely that General Wadsworth’s comment that a quarter of the men mustered for the expedition were boys and old men was true. Despite the employment of relatively

¹⁷⁴Kevitt, 66-67.

¹⁷⁵Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 35-36.

intact militia companies, units still lacked the same training and leaderships skills of the provincial armies.

Recruiting the Expedition

The General Court's investigating committee concluded that if Brigadier General Lovell had the full complement of 1,500 militia he would have had success. Yet the fact that Maine could raise such a force was a large assumption by Massachusetts. As a point of reference, on 9 June 1779, Massachusetts issued quotas to the counties in order to fill fifteen Massachusetts battalions for service in the Continental Army. Of the two thousand men levied, the quota for the three Maine counties equaled two hundred and forty-seven men.¹⁷⁶ The requirements for the Penobscot Expedition showed a six-fold increase over the anticipated soldier requirements earlier that month. Locally, Lincoln County, which encompassed the Penobscot River, saw a nine-fold increase in its quota of men. Given the emergency conditions, it may seem sensible that the people most affected by the British invasion would furnish the most men.

It is difficult to assess Maine's ongoing contribution to the war in 1779 because its soldiers served in Massachusetts regiments and not in specific Maine regiments. The Maine Historical Society estimates Maine conducted six thousand enlistments throughout the war, not including reenlistments. Of those, the society confirmed nearly eleven hundred of them served at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777 and 1778.¹⁷⁷ In 1779,

¹⁷⁶Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves*, 21:43. Of the 247 men, the quota by county is York-101 men, Cumberland-80, and Lincoln-66.

¹⁷⁷Maine Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, *Maine at Valley Forge* (Portland, ME: [n.r.], 1908), 9.

men from Maine served as part of Massachusetts' regiments in Rhode Island, in George Washington's Army in New York, and as part of General John Sullivan's Expedition. Additionally, local defense demanded more troops from the militia manpower pool. The town of Machais, precariously positioned on Maine's ill-defined border with Nova Scotia and Falmouth, both objects of previous British attacks, maintained their own active garrisons of militia. Other towns maintained their own small forces as protection against British foraging parties or even worse, raids conducted by American privateers.

The account of Colonel John Brewer (then a captain), founder of the present day city of Bangor demonstrates the split loyalties of the militia. As a commander of a militia company, he and his men did not answer the call to serve in the Penobscot Expedition. Instead, the town committee decided to weigh its own options, sending him to meet with General McLean personally. He even conducted a second visit to McLean the day prior to the American's arrival. Afterwards, he hailed the ships of the expedition and met with his brother, Colonel Josiah Brewer. His brother took him to Lovell and Saltonstall in order to give them intelligence on the British defenses. Completing that, he returned home with orders from his brother to return with half of his militia company. His response demonstrates his split loyalties, which no doubt mirrored that of the local population in general. —This order I obeyed; but my family not then being in a situation to leave, my men were put under the command of another captain, and I returned home for one week, when I again repaired to my post." Later, after he returned and the siege wore on, he noted ~~nothing~~ important appearing to be going on, [so] I again returned home."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸Wheeler, 331.

Living just miles up the Penobscot River, the British fort was certainly a direct threat, yet both Brewer and his community remained cautiously neutral.

While Massachusetts militia laws clearly provided for the impressment of men into military service, it was far from the preferred method of doing so. Massachusetts had long relied on enlistment bounties to encourage men to join voluntarily. In 1779, Massachusetts recruits for the Continental Army received a bounty of thirty pounds and one hundred acres of land in exchange for nine months of service.¹⁷⁹ Massachusetts assumed the levity of the crisis and the two month enlistments were enough to entice volunteers for the expedition. Unable to raise enough volunteers, commanders resorted to impressment. The York County commander reported that several of his soldiers had to be brought by force of arms. The Adjutant General, Jeremiah Hill, reported similar issues with men “sulking off” to avoid service. The demands of the expedition, to be met in less than two weeks, simply overwhelmed the draft system used to dealing with filling out smaller quotas. Pressed to fill their quotas, the counties did their best. The rapid demand for troops broke the traditional method of volunteerism. Adjutant General Hill summed up the minimum qualifications for the soldiers of the expedition, “if they belonged to the train band or alarm list they were soldiers, whether they could carry a gun, walk a mile without crutches or only compos mentis sufficient to keep themselves out of fire and water.”¹⁸⁰ The patriotic zeal that brought men to Lexington in 1775 disappeared to the realities of protracted war.

¹⁷⁹Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves*, 21:34, 41-43.

¹⁸⁰Baxter, 17:263.

Preparing Provincial Armies

The inherent inefficiency of provincial armies frustrated those who tried to create and lead them. While the colony often tried to select the most competent officers to lead the armies, they were often limited in the amount of experienced leaders to draw upon. Unfortunately, successful small unit tactical commanders rarely translated into successful commanders of large, complex armies. General Pepperrell who led the successful Louisbourg Expedition in 1745 lacked any significant military expertise or training, but proved to be persistent and level-headed, if not cautious. Other leaders such as Colonel John March, who led a small garrison in a successful defense against a French and Indian attack, found the challenges of besieging Port Royale at the head of a large army something he was ill trained and prepared for. After failing once and in the process of failing a second time, he broke down and handed off command.

In selecting General Lovell, Massachusetts simply selected the best possible candidate for the position. As a member of the General Assembly, he was one the body's own and could be counted on to understand the importance of the operation. Additionally, he had better military credentials than many. His performance in Rhode Island as a militia commander the previous year drew praise from commanders such as Nathaniel Greene and John Sullivan. Additionally he was a veteran of the French and Indian War and served early in the revolution, defending Boston. Few other leaders in the Massachusetts militia had such recent credentials. General Wadsworth was also well suited for his position. Only thirty-one years of age, he proved to be an energetic and able second in command for Lovell. For the most part, he led almost all major offensive actions during the expedition and more than any other leader, sought to salvage some sort

of sanity during the chaotic destruction of the American fleet. As the only full-time officer, Lieutenant Colonel Revere for the most part fulfilled his duties as the commander of the expedition's artillery. He later ran afoul of General Wadsworth who ordered his arrest and accused him of dereliction of duty during the expedition's retreat. Although he generally accomplished assigned tasks, he did so with little zeal. While perhaps he was one of the few realists amongst the officers, records of the expedition's councils of war show him as an outspoken and early advocate of raising the siege and returning home without accomplishing the expedition's purpose. His actions during the expedition resulted in his removal from service.

The Maine militia that participated in the expedition is a somewhat unique blend of partially intact militia companies mixed into a provisional regiment. As a result, many of the men, volunteers or otherwise served under their normal company under their captain or one of an adjacent town. Although some level of familiarity existed, it did not significantly enhance the effectiveness of the units. While the militia provided defensive functions for their towns, it did so in the form of small detachments of men performing garrison duties or watches. Rarely if at all did units have the need to conduct company level training for defensive operations. At the regimental level, counties formed commands specifically for the operation which is typical of a provincial army. Most of the units formed for the first time a day or two prior to the arrival of the transports taking them the Penobscot Bay. Like more expeditions, the units assembled on the fly and attempted to sort things out as the different units and leaders attempted find out where they fit in the overall structure.

The other two land forces Lovell used during the expedition consisted of regular troops, or at least troops that served on a full time basis. Lieutenant Colonel Revere's detachment from the Castle Island artillery train consisted of soldiers with three-year enlistments that began well before the expedition. For the most part, these troops preformed their duties during the expedition strictly as specialists, primarily establishing artillery positions and employing the cannon. The second force was the Continental and state marines that sailed with Saltonstall's fleet. The marines acted professionally and were well led down at the junior level. They formed the core of most of the expedition's major offenses. Marines conducted the first landings on Nautilus Island and served as a lead element in the landing on Dyce's Head. Marines under Captain Welch fought the sharpest battle of the expedition while climbing the rugged slope of the peninsula, suffering the heaviest casualties. Marines later led the briefly successful attack on the half-moon battery and again in Lovell's final attack to take the British rear. The importance of the marines to Lovell is evident as it was a point of major contention between him and Saltonstall. It is unlikely that the final attack would have occurred at all if Lovell had not received one hundred marines from the fleet, even as they prepared to engage Mowat's ships themselves. Lovell's reliance on the marines speaks much to his assessment of his militia force.

Assembling Expeditions

Prior to the Penobscot Expedition, Massachusetts showed a positive trend towards administrative proficiency of assembling seaborne expeditions to operate in Maine and Canada. While able to assemble necessary provisions and supplies, the militia still provided the manpower. The colony came a long way from Sir William Phips ill fated

attack on Quebec in 1690, where inadequate supplies proved his undoing. Fifty years later, when General William Pepperell's successful expedition to Louisbourg suffered similar although not as debilitating supply issues. The fortunate interdiction of supplies by the Royal Navy boosted his siege as his supplies from Boston ran alarmingly low. Despite challenges in assembling the necessary provisions and equipment for the Penobscot Expedition, the only shortages noted by Lovell during the expedition were of hand grenades and mortars. While shortages of food and equipment may have existed they did not hamper the American force. Nor were there are no existing records of the requisitioning or seizure of local supplies until the scattered westward retreat of the land and sea forces. This is a remarkable feat considering the competing demands of the ongoing war and necessity to provide supplies to regular forces serving in New York and Rhode Island.

To assemble its fleet, however, Massachusetts gambled its credit on the expedition's success. The colony had done so before and often lost, but the royal treasury became its safety net. Massachusetts may have assumed that the Continental Congress would do the same, and in hindsight they did. The impressive size of the fleet, despite its poor use, demonstrated not only the capability, but the commitment by the colony to build a successful expedition. It is unlikely, however, that the magnitude of the disaster was a possibility to the General Court when it offered it. It was a calculated risk to get ships and crew cheaply to support the expedition. Besides the pay for the crew, the true financial incentive for ship owners was their anticipated shares in captured material and equipment.

While Massachusetts had developed the capability to build adequately supply expeditions, leadership experience of the militia constrained operations. While the colony built the expedition, it did little in the way of gathering intelligence, training the expeditions for specific tasks, and tactical planning, these areas remained up to the individual commander. When Pepperell sailed from Boston, Governor Shirley had given him a detailed landing plan demanding precision timing. Realistic follow-on instructions remained vague and up to Pepperell. Even then, the friction of war rendered Shirley's plan worthless. Commanders of provisional armies had to concern themselves more with the raising of the army than with the tactical issues that would face them on arrival. As a result, they often arrived on the scene with nothing more than a general landing scheme. Commanders lacked the experience to think through entire campaigns. This is the case with Lovell when developing his plan for the Penobscot Expedition. While he developed a plan for the initial landing, he gave little thought as to how the follow-on objectives were going to be accomplished. It remained a constraint in both the militia's leader development and the provincial army system.

The Penobscot Expedition would be the last major expedition organized by Massachusetts. With the exception of small localized raids and the standing British garrison on the Bagaduce Peninsula, the Revolutionary War remained outside of Massachusetts' borders. Following the war, the national government assumed external security requirements for its states. Direct threats to Massachusetts from external forces eventually disappeared and the militia slowly absorbed into the national militia system even as universal military service declined. The debate of maintaining professional standing armies over militia forces remained an issue within America for years to come.

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